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DILIP KUMAR MUKHERJEE

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We deeply mourn the death of Prof. Prabodh Chandra Ghose, who was loved and respected by his colleagues and by his innumerable students, and who loved this university and the department. May his memory remain a treasured inspiration !
May his soul rest in peace !

* Obituary article in the next number.

THE POETRY OF JUDITH WRIGHT —AN ATTEMPT AT INTERPRETATION

DILIP KUMAR SEN

STRAIGHT as a stalk of lavender, soft as a rope of silk, Judith Wright comes into the domain of Australian poetry with a unique charm. Her portrait at the back cover page of *Alive, Poems 1971-72* brings out clearly this uniqueness of hers—her strikingly powerful eyes, her innate simplicity in dress, her determined, earnest aspect and her quietly unobtrusive but firm bearing immediately give one the unmistakable impression of a sturdy personality which chafes at restrictions and looks down upon political, social and racial shibboleths. Born on 31 May, 1915 in Arundale, in New South Wales, Judith Wright passed her childhood in New England. Shy by nature and living in a solitary place, she was fortunate, like Wordsworth's Lucy, to grow in sun and shower and also to escape the grind of a formal education. Born in a family interested in literature, she had in her mother a meet nurse for a poetic child. She introduced her daughter to the magic world of poetry by her recitation. Judith Wright herself tells us that her first poem was written when she was six. It was after her mother's death in 1927 that she had had her first taste of regular and systematic schooling. In her school her poetical sensibility was developed by a sympathetic teacher of English who had a *flair* for accurate, clear cut vocabulary, tinged with the glow of imagination—a faculty so essential to writing poetry.

Judith Wright thus had from her childhood two important qualifications for being a poet—a love for the effect of words and a sense of detachment from the world of experience, flat, sterile and unattractive. Leaving school in 1933 she studied English at Sydney but did not bother to qualify for a university degree. She read widely in history, psychology, philosophy, French and Italian. At 22 she went to Europe and carried back home undying sparks of memories of

walking tours in many countries. In Scotland from where her family had come to Australia she seemed to strike up a spiritual kinship with Rob Roy from family traditions and anecdotes. On her return voyage she stopped for a while at exotic Ceylon.

Back home, she held a variety of jobs, looked after considerable family property for sometime and in 1943 or thereabouts came into touch with C. B. Christesen, the then editor of *Meanjin*, helping him in his business and editorial work. Christesan published her first book of poems—*The Moving Image* in 1946. The success of the book was tremendous¹. Since 1946 she has been writing regularly. In 1949 came out *Woman to Man*. It was followed by *The Gateway* (1953), *The Two Fires* (1955), *Birds* (1962), *Five Senses* (1965), *The Other Half* (1966) and *Collected Poems* (1942-1970), (1971), with a new series entitled *Shadow*, a previously unpublished book of poems written between 1966 and 1970 and *Allive, Poems of 1971-72* (1973). A gifted poet, Judith Wright is equally at home in prose. Her books of literary criticism, a book of short stories, several stories for children, a history of the generations of men who were the forebears of her family and her publications in the field of conservation of environment testify to her mastery in the manipulation of words in evocation of feeling in a prose narrative.

The Moving Image is no *tour de force*. Twenty years of poetry making was behind it. It draws its inspiration from the Platonic notion of Time as a moving image of eternity and is a kind of poetical manifesto of a poetess making her debut in literature. The first poem in the volume is a prolonged philosophical meditation on the place and task of the poet in the universe and is to be regarded as the song that must issue from the mouth of the possessed poet^a—

In some of the other poems of this volume Judith Wright turns to the New England landscape, to the 'delicate, dry breasts of the

country that bind her heart'. Some, e. g., *Blue Arab Trapped Dingo* testify to her inborn love of animals, birds and those other' willing and involuntary fellow-travellers of mankind' in their exploration of this planet. '*Waiting, Remittance Man, Country Town, Sonnet, Bullocky* re-create her love for the country for the 'harsh and beautiful countryside'. In *To A. H. New Year 1943* and *Trains* she remembers with a pang "the debit of the years of war". Addressing the dead pilot in the former poem she optimistically clings to the hope that soon the world will sleep, lapped in eternal love—

"Since blood has been your gift, let me accept it
remembering that for spring's resurrection
some sacrifice was always necessary"

In the direct treatment of the theme of time in the title-piece, *The Moving Image*, is felt a sense of the destructiveness of time, its hostility to permanence. There is some effort to see time also as the means of renewal and continuity⁸. In "The Company of Lovers" love is offered as a precarious refuge as "Death draws his cordons in"; in *Waiting* the individual life is seen as at the mercy of what the unknown future may hold :

"...the circling days weave tighten, and the spider
Time binds us helpless till his sting go in."

Woman to Man, her next book of poems, is perhaps a more profound book. It has as its motto the words of Francis Bacon in *The Wisdom of the Ancients* "Love was the most ancient of all the gods and existed before anything else except Chaos, which is held co-eval therewith". Experience of love and love-making from the point of view of a woman is the abiding theme of this book. Women have been thrilled with the endless wonderfulness of love since the days of Adam and Eve but to Judith Wright the centre of the experience is to be sought in the creation of a new life—and she exultantly invokes this new birth—

"O wake in me, my darling
The knife of day is bright
to cut the thread that binds you
within the flesh of night." (*Woman's song*)

Rightly has Ronald McCuaig remarked—"Her forte is the rendering of woman's love for man and for babies"⁴. In an interview, she remarked "There is an intrinsic inbuilt difference between men and women—a difference which will always colour male and female poetry. This is so because women are much more inclined to rely on their basic experience. They are more in touch with life in the raw this basic touch with life probably is woman's main strength"⁵.

The poems included in *Woman to Man* have varied themes. *The Sisters* has a wistful air and tells the story of "two spinsters" who pass their time "thinking of the marriage bed and of the birth of the first child". *Night After Bushfire* and *Bushfire* stare at charred death from sockets black with flame. In *The Mirror at the Funfair* she looks unblinking at "the twisted images that from the mirror grimace like hatred". *The Bull* is different from Ralph Hodgson's poem on the same animal, here, he is a "red Jupiter heavy with power". In *The Cycads* the scene changes from New England to Mount Tambourine in Queensland, where a new landscape impinges upon her consciousness, demanding acceptance. But the most touching of the poems gathered in this volume are the two entitled *The Unborn*. No other poet has perhaps tried to clothe in words—tragic and beautiful—of the anguish of the life that perished without getting past the first stage of infancy—"the lipless drinker at my drowsy breast"—

Neither awake nor asleep
On the rack of dark, I lie,
Hearing my own not-voice.
"What was I ? I ? I ?"

In *The Gateway* Judith Wright moves on from the theme of tragedy of fertility to the heroism of regrowth⁶. The death of the old is the gateway through which this new birth will emerge —

"and from night's mud
the unmade, the inchoate
starts to take shape and rise" (*Dark Gift*)

In *The Cedars* the theme is the regeneration of nature in spring and the perennial anguish of the cedars for whom the overtures of

spring have no meaning —

“Hold back your fires that would sear us
 into flower again
and your insistent bees, the messengers of
 generation.”

The Two Fires came out two years after *The Gateway*. It has as its motto the following lines from Heraklietos — “This world which is the same for all, no one of gods or men have made ; but it was over, is now, and ever shall be an ever-living Fire, with measures of it kindling, and measures going out”. “This everlasting fire, constantly rekindling, is the fire of life and the fire going out is the fire that destroys, — the final conflagration, predicted by legends, by religions, by prophets and philosophers in the infancy of civilization”. Most of the poems in this collection are concerned with this constantly rekindling everlasting fire —

“Time strips the soul and leaves it comfortless
 and sends it thirsty through a bone-white drought”.

(The Harp and the King)

There are a few dainty poem in *Two Fires* having very little connexion with the main theme. One of these is *Flying Fox on Barbed Wire* which expresses tender sympathy for a “little nightmare flying fox trapped on the cruel barbs of day”. *At Cooloola* she recalls the memory of those dark-skinned people dispossessed of their land and feels uneasy to think that she has no place there —

“And walking on clean sand among the prints
 of bird and animal, I am challenged by a driftwood spear
 thrust from the water”

Birds which came out in 1962 was written for her daughter, Meredith and consists of a string of neat, pleasantly and keenly observed verses on different kinds of Australian birds. In *The Peacock* she presents the bird with blue and copper sheens, locked in a dirty cage but asserts that neither time nor custom can stain its joy. In *Parrots* she is struck by the lovely greed of these birds as they descend upon swelling loquats, glowing —

“like oval beads of cloudy amber,
 Or small fat flames of birthday candles”.

In these poems the characters and personalities of individual Australian birds come out vividly. One notices in them an element of simple humour which heightens the vividness and accuracy of description^s.

The Five Senses published in 1963 is Judith Wright's attempt at showing poetry's role of mediating between the two worlds, sometimes exasperating but more often reconciling their conflict^o. The emphasis here is upon the poets' activity as creative, "forming into one chord what's separate and distracted" so that what is fashioned from the imperfect world has a perfection that transcends it :

While I'm in my five senses
they send me spinning
all sounds and silences,
all shape and colour
as thread for that weaver,
whose web within me growing
follows beyond my knowing
some pattern sprung from nothing —
a rhythm that dances
and is not mine.

The Other Half came out in 1966. The two halves are the conscious and unconscious personalities — the one that 'undrowns' when the poet is asleep and the other that conducts the mundane movements of daily life. Altogether this is a collection containing poems on a variety of themes. In *Encounter* she has a vision in which she realizes the loving pattern behind the creation of this universe where

"in the rockpools of the shore
creatures like flowers, and jewels
wait dumbly for my eyes' translation".

In *Power*, she sees a kestrel, sprawled on the power lines, swooping down on a lizard, which, swerving aside, makes the bird miss his dive and drop down dead, "a flutter of feathers" and is reminded of "death's excess, life's helplessness".

In *Cleaning Day* she is thrilled at the sight of "humble and worn-out things put up their scarlet wings". In "Typists in the Phoenix Building" she looks at the intricate, lifeless pattern of modern commercial life. Everything is there — comptometers, calculators and the thousand and other paraphernalia of an office together with a bevy of smartly dressed women typists and clerks who are, alas, "half cocks" and

"Shirley and her clerk
in tiled and fireproof corridors
touch and fall apart. No fires —
consume the banked comptometers
no flood has lipped the inlaid floors".

The last poem in this collection is appropriately called "Turning Fifty". Here Judith Wright toasts the sun with a coffee cup, on her fiftieth birth-day —

"dark, bitter, neutral, clean,
sober as mornig —
to all I've seen and known —
to this new sun".

In Alive : Poems 1971-72. Judith Wright is rather relaxed and a trifle informal. She knows that women are always dreaming about houses and her pleasant occupation here is to show how it feels to be a house-proud woman in her fifties, living in a house that is also in its fifties. The nine poems, grouped under *Habitat* develop this theme—Remembrance of the past events coming to her mind, creaking like footsteps, puts a halo round the house. She starts chewing the cud of memory and remembers the cyclone which rolled the house like a wooden ship, the eight-foot carpet snake wintering in the ceiling, the long heat-wave, cracking and shrinking the wood. Memories come crowding to her mind—memories of possums, mud wasps, spiders and she finds infinite happiness living in a house, made of wood—

"Wood is hospitable
even eatable,—
subject to destruction,
the only stuff to live in
for destructible people."

Though death is certain, she finds immense joy in the endless wonderfullness of life. Furniture has a special appeal for her and she sees items of furniture lying here and there, like an ageing aunt waiting to hold the new baby, asking for nothing, except to be there, to be used. Mirrors in the house keep crooning into her ears of the vanity and ugliness of human beings. Beds, dressed meekly in white, have a surprising similarity with brides in white, waiting all day silently for night to undo them. The house is a refuge, though cluttered up with juggernaut machines, with nails loose, with doors creaking—

“We were fortunate, house ; in a world of exiles
stateless, homeless, wandering, spying, murdering,
wars. bewilderment, losses and betrayals,
we found each other.

In your spaces and awkward corners
We spread our lives out, fitted and grew together.”

There is a heart-warming poem in this collection. Its title is *Wedding Photograph 1913*. Here the poet now

“a grey-haired daughter” looks lovingly at the wedding photograph of her parents—

“Ineloquent, side by side, this country couple
smiling confettied outside the family house—
he with his awkward faun-look, ears spread wide,
she with her downward conscious poise of beauty.”

and remembers with a stab of pain the “moralities imparted shyly, scoldings, love and kindnesses, the tweed shoulder sobbed-on, the sound of songs at a piano” and derives comfort from remembering happier things.

No recent Australian poet has won wider appreciation and critical regard than Judith Wright¹⁰. I, for one, feel tempted to attribute her grand poetic success to her having kept what E. M. Forster once called ‘the world of anger and telegrams’ at an arm’s length from her. In her mingle many strains of thought and numerous literary nuances -

“Many roads meet here
in me the traveller and the ways I travel,
All the hills’ gathered waters feed my seas

who am the swimmer and the mountain-river,
and the long slopes' concurrence is my flesh
who am the gazer and the land I stare on
and dogwood blooms within my winter blood
and orchards fruit in me and need no season”

(*For New England*)

One of the things contributing to Judith Wright's popularity is the essential womanliness of many of her poems. In *Woman to Man* she presents love as a counter to the destructiveness of Time. Poetry has had much to say about the act of love but practically nothing about gestation and birth. This is Judith Wright's special concern. It is this awareness of the process from generation to generation which is fundamental to Judith Wright's vision of the world—the masculine view that prevails in poetry of life stretching from the cradle to the grave is replaced in hers by the experience of life stretching from seed time to harvest, from the act of birth to the quickening of the womb¹¹. Time, that subtle thief, makes her eyes brim with tears but she is confident of the imperious power love and sings—

“fear no winter and no storm,
while in the knot of earth that root lies warm.

(*Sonnet for Christmas*)

This root is of course the seed of love.

I shall now turn to another aspect of Judith Wright's literary output—to be precise, to her pioneer work in the cause of conservation. A pamphlet *Conservation as an Emerging Concept* (1970) and the editorship of the report of the committee appointed by the Australian Government to enquire into the National Estate are her significant contributions on this subject. She realized that discontinuation of the cultivation of the soil in the traditional manner and neglect of the preservation of the natural ecology have brought Australia to a dismal situation. The indiscriminate felling of native trees and planting in their places, pines elms, poplars, willows and some fruit trees to remind the colonists of their English background has so affected the land that it is now steep, vulnerable cow pastures, half overgrown with introduced weeds—lantana, groundsel and tobacco bush—a menace to painstaking farmers, a likely landslide

area in a water catchment¹³. Her unselfconscious acceptance of Australia¹³ has coloured her attitude to the flora and fauna of the country in which she lives. Her house on the top of Tambourine Mountain in Queensland has a cluster of small palm-like plants called cycads, the oldest living things on earth. She greets these trees enthusiastically —

“leaning together, down those gulfs they stare
over whose darkness dance the brilliant birds
that cry in air one moment, and are gone
and with their countless suns the years spin on”.

There was a particular cycad called grand father Peter in the locality. In *Sanctuary* she bewails the fact of its wanton destruction—

“here the old tree stood
for how many years ? that old gnome tree
some axe-new boy cut down.”

In a Document she upbraids herself when in a mood of patriotism she decided to sell to the government the coachwood forest, hoary with age — a part of her family property.

Under our socio-legal dispensation
both name and woodland had been given me.
I was much younger than any tree
matured for timber. But to help the nation
I signed the document. The stand was pure
(eight hundred trees perhaps). Uneasily
(the bank smells sweetly when you wound the tree)
I set upon this land my signature.

Another significant strand in Judith Wright's poetry is her spiritual kinship with the Aborigines. She appears to be a latter-day Jindyworobak, fighting for spiritual identification with the physical country where she had been born. She has been living in a hut that's upside down and to put it right side up she has been reaching her hands out to the Aborigines ‘the miserablest people’ as Dampier, the English scamp who visited Australia in 1688 called these people¹⁴. In *Bora Ring* she bewails the destruction of the fabric of life of the Aborigines. In *Cooloola* the twilight reminds her that she is a stranger, come of a conquering people.

"being unloved by all my eyes delight in
and made uneasy, for old murder's sake."

In *Two Dream times* she addresses Kath Walker, the aboriginal writer as "my sister with the torn heart" and recounts the sordid story of how the aborigines were cheated of their land and tries to measure the sorrow of the blank-eyed taken women

"arms over your breast folding
your sorrow in to hold it."

The present does not hold out any promise of reconciliation for

"A knife's between us. My righteous kin
still have cruel faces."

It is indeed a great pleasure to think that Judith Wright is still with us. The list of her published poems is impressive. In them she shows a brilliance of image, a rhetorical facility which assists her in the image making, an elevated sense of "her mission both as a woman and poet and a strikingly strong lyrical impulse¹⁵.

She still continues writing poetry, for she believes that "when poetry withers in us, the greater part of experience and reality wither too, and when this happens, we live in a desolate world of facts, not of truth—a world scarcely worth the trouble of living."¹⁶

NOTES

1. See A. D. Hope : *Judith Wright* (Australian Writers and their work), O. U. P. Melbourne, 1975, p. 5.
2. *Ibid.* p. 7.
3. G. A. Wilkes : *Australian Literature : A Conspectus*. (Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, Monograph No. 2) Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1970, p. 113.
4. Ronald McCuaig : Reference Paper on Literature, Australian News & Information Bureau, June 1962, p. 5.
5. Judith Wright interviewed by John Thompson *Southerly* Vol. 27 No. I, 1967.
6. Rodney Hall: *Themes in Judith Wright's Poetry* in *The Literature of Australia* ed. Geoffrey Dutton, Penguin Books, 1976, p. 393.

7. A. D. Hope : *Native Companions*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney 1974, p. 79.
8. A. D. Hope : *Judith Wright*. op. cit. p. 17.
9. G. A. Wilkes : op. cit. p. 117.
10. J. McAuley : *A Map of Australian Poetry*, p. 160.
11. A. D. Hope : *Native Companions*, op. cit. p. 80.
12. Judith Wright : *Because I was Invited*, Melbourne, 1971.
13. The phrase is quoted from R. T. Brissenden : *The Poetry of Judith Wright, Meanjin*. Vol. 12, No. 3, 1953, p. 2581.
14. G. W. Turner : *The English Language in Australia and New Zealand*, London, 1965, p. 2.
15. Vincent Buckley : *Essays in Poets*, 1957, pp. 175-176.
16. Judith Wright : Introduction to *Selected Poems* (Australian Poets Series, 1963) p. VI.

OTHELLO AND THE PROBLEM PLAYS : A WORLD OF CHRYSOLITE EMBEDDED IN CHAOS

GAURI PRASAD GHOSH

[This essay is intended to form the third chapter of the projected second volume of the author's work on the development of Shakespeare's life-vision. The two earlier essays, on *Hamlet* and on the Problem Plays, came out in previous issues of this journal.]

IT has been widely accepted on the basis of external as well as internal evidence that *Troilus and Cressida* and *All's Well That Ends Well* were composed in that order between 1601 and 1603, and that *Measure for Measure* was written a little later in 1604, perhaps stretching on to the early months of 1605. This would mean that *Troilus* and *All's Well* were written about the beginning of the Tragic Period just after the composition of *Hamlet* and that *Measure for Measure* came into being in the very heart of that spell of gloom, just after the composition of *Othello*.¹ We find a dark confusion of values shadowed forth for the first time in the play of *Hamlet* with which Shakespeare launches himself inexorably on the tragic course.² But a real shaking up of the character-based realism of Shakespeare comes about in the so-called Problem Plays in which the shadows of confusion deepen into a negative obsession, resulting in narrow, one-sided portrayals of life and in grave artistic disharmony.³ It is therefore with no small wonder that we notice the chronological position of *Othello*, wedged in, as it were, between *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*. It is like the incredible vision of a perfect little gem of architecture standing in the midst of two bizarre structures, one clumsily sprawling and the other painfully contorted, affording the most awkward study in contrast. If we add *Timon of Athens* to these three products of confused vision, the position of *Othello* becomes still more intriguing, with *Troilus* and *All's Well* on one side of it and *Measure for Measure* and *Timon* on the other.⁴

This generally accepted position of *Othello* after *All's Well* and before *Measure for Measure* provides fairly conclusive evidence regarding the parallel operation, or rather the close alternation, of two strangely contrasted types of vision—the vision of tragic realism and the vision of a topsy-turvy world—in the mind of Shakespeare in this earlier half of the Great Tragic Period stretching roughly from 1601 to 1604. *Othello*, standing in the midst of a tottering world, presents us with a deep and flawless realistic spectacle in which the countless tints of living reality are perfectly assembled and blended, and with the most concrete felicities that Shakespeare's pen has created.⁵ In *Measure for Measure* character is fluidity itself: Angelo and Isabella change unrecognizably under the stress of circumstance. In *Othello* character is the rock-bed of human nature and of social life. The slightest touch of the *Measure for Measure*-type changeability in the characters of *Othello* would have unhinged its realism. On the other hand, if its characters had the rigid one-quality composition of the figures in *Troilus and Cressida*, they would have rendered any real tragic development impossible. The characters in *Othello* have their inalienable inner natures, and the processes of development we notice in them further unfold their characteristic qualities and sharpen the impression of their individuality.⁶ They suffer neither from the dead rigidity of the figures in *Troilus and Cressida*, nor from the extreme malleability of the central characters in *Measure for Measure*. Their being and their motion are parts of the same vivid life-process. Again, the philosophical implications emerging from the three Problems Plays are absent in *Othello*. While *Troilus and Cressida* presents an array of static characters in whom characteristic "humours" dominate, *Measure for Measure*, apart from portraying a spate of chronic human weakness, brings up a number of persons in whose unexpected transformations one can read vague symbols of the fundamental frailty of the human disposition. But the characters in *Othello*, while indirectly suggesting typical and universal truth, bear no marked symbolical aura. Each is a perfectly conceived concrete individual moving to the rhythm of life, but with a distinct sub-rhythm of his or her own: creations of an "absolute dramatic imagination"⁷ working at its highest pitch and with uniform intensity. The crowning evidence of this all-harmonizing all-individualizing imagination

is to be found in the creation of Iago who is more fully identified with evil than any other mature Shakespearean character, and yet, in spite of the symbolical possibilities of his character and the penumbra of mystery clinging to his figure, has been made into as lifelike an individual as any other in the play.⁸

The general representation of life in *Othello* creates the same impression of absolute verisimilitude. In *Troilus and Cressida* human folly and baseness and inconstancy are mercilessly paraded while an ineffectual wisdom is solely confined to the semi-abstract personality of Ulysses, and an even more ineffectual nobleness and dignity is confined to the figure of Hector, who, too, suffers a moral decline at the end. In *Measure for Measure* goodness turns into evil, austerity into licence, wisdom into folly, Christian charity into tigerish fury, and justice in more than one way into a travesty of itself. In *Othello* on the other hand, though the poet is studying the tragic type of situation and characters typically involved in such situations, he presents a picture of life that is perfectly balanced and wholesome and in which goodness and all the human values which make life worth living are kept steadily in view and occupy a deeply significant place in the pattern of life that the poet weaves for us. There is evil and there is good in living interaction. There are characters compounded of various shades of good and evil—each a vivid, complex psychological entity—involved in a subtle network of actions and reactions which bring us face to face with the very essence of phenomenal reality. Every single unit is neatly, perfectly conceived. Desdemona may appear to be as close to feminine perfection as makes no difference; but there is a difference, a difference that makes her a much more real individual than she would otherwise have been. First, there is a certain thoughtlessness about her which makes itself felt at two critical moments of her life: once when she plunges into that rebellious marriage without trying her utmost—as a sensible girl would have done—to maintain good relations with her father, and later, when she keeps on nagging Othello day after day about Cassio's reinstatement even though it obviously irritates him. Secondly, it is that absolute meekness of hers, that entirely submissive love—a quality which might have proved an additional asset, if her portion in life had been different—that comes to take the role of a serious weakness and involves

her in tragedy. One touch of the Cordelia spirit in her, as Bradley puts it, and Othello's illusions would have been shattered and Iago undone. But that was not to be, because the poet had visualized her character exactly as we find her in the play, as a particular individual figuring in a particular tragic pattern in subtle interaction with other particular individuals. And the same is true of all the other characters. Cassio, Roderigo, Emilia : each is a perfectly visualized distinct psychological complex. And the peak of this concreteness of visualization, as I have already observed, is reached in the creation of Iago, that near-complete embodiment of moral evil. We have hardly ever seen a person like Iago in real life. Yet in Shakespeare's play we see him as vividly before our eyes as we see Othello or Desdemona.

Such is the unmistakable duality of vision that confronts us in the alternation of integrated tragedy and tragic-comic patchwork that we find taking place approximately between the years 1600 and 1604. What is most remarkable is that the attitude, the vision of life, that makes itself felt in the Problem Plays is almost in every way—except in a common consciousness of evil—the opposite of the way of looking at life reflected in the tragedies and particularly in *Othello* which stands right in the middle of the Problem Play spell. Character in these plays, as we have already observed, loses its luminous clarity of contour, its subtle psychological texture and its living individuality and becomes a vague, one-sided representation of some mental quality or other (which I would call the A type deviation) or assume a strange malleability, a tendency to be transformed by the impact of circumstance into something totally unlike itself (the B type deviation). The great emphasis put on character in the tragedies, particularly in *Othello*, making it appear largely the arbiter of its own fate, almost disappears in the Problem Plays. The characters in the latter are mechanically passion-dominated. They appear poor in free will, far too dominated by unchangeable inner impulsions (the A type deviation) or by the pressure of circumstance which evokes the most unexpected responses from them (the B Type deviation) to be regarded as truly living *dramatis personae*. While the characters in the tragedies, and particularly in *Othello*, are concrete living individuals with minutely characteristic reactions to everything that happens to them, the demi-puppets of the Problem Plays

are largely unreal as individuals, and whatever individuality they possess merges indistinguishably with the vague symbolic aura that surrounds them.

The difference in plot-weaving is no less sharp. While the plots of the tragedies are more or less organic products of an evil-haunted but deeply harmonized vision of reality, producing near-perfect artistic forms, the plots of the Problem Plays are impelled by dimly defined purposes, by the presence of ideas and feelings apparently obsessing the dramatist's mind and seeking expression through awkward and often unwholesome distortion of the material of life. In every way the attitude of mind that we find variously struggling for expression in the Problem Plays suggests *a mysterious tendency towards the disintegration of Shakespeare's profound imaginative realism in the very period in which that realism was building itself up in supreme tragic works.*

How is it then that right in the heart of the vague chaotic spell we loosely call the Problem Plays we find the perfectly controlled, perfectly harmonized vision of evil-ridden reality in the form of the tragedy of *Othello*? The difference is between evil not understood and evil (at least relatively) understood, between the sense of a vague chaotic evil pervading the whole panorama of life and a sense of an evil powerful and ominous but emerging in meaningful interaction with the other forces in life. Both are present in *Hamlet*, though the co-ordinated tragic vision dominates in it. But the sense of a dark confusion which appears in recurring overtones of gloom in *Hamlet* becomes the dominant, the overwhelming feeling in the Problem Plays. Evil, whether of the *Troilus* type or of the *Measure for Measure* type, creates a painful confusion in these plays because its source, its meaning, its relationship with life as a whole, are not understood. Or, if it is taken to be understood, it leads to a depressingly pessimistic view of life which itself is bewildering. On the other hand, evil, however frightening, is on the whole understood, or thought to be understood, in the great tragedies, and that is why it has been possible to mould these many-sided visions of evil into harmonious artistic designs.⁹ Among these harmonized visions of evil, again, *Othello* has a special place. *In Othello evil is most understood.* It is most understood because it is the least complex. And it is the least complex because it is virtually confined to one individual—Iago.

There are other shades of evil or weakness in *Othello*; but they are minor. The one real motive spring of evil is the thwarted, insulted egotism of Iago, an extraordinarily intelligent, devious-minded, cold-blooded, amoral and ruthless individual who coolly resolves to become, in Hazlitt's unforgettable words, "an amateur of tragedy in real life."

Evil in *Othello* is thus held in secure bounds : within the confines of a single personality. At best there is just one more evil-touched personality, Othello himself, with that dangerous potential of imbalance in him. But evil is not omnipresent in the play. It does not haunt the landscape of life as it does in the Problem Plays. It is not shrouded in mystery or unaccountable in its origins as it is in those plays. Even though Shakespeare does appear to find a touch of mystery in Iago, the mystery never assumes the depth of a philosophical question. It should be realized, however, that the evil represented by Shakespeare's Iago has a much broader social significance than the evil represented by Cinthio's Ensign. The Ensign acts mainly out of frustrated lust and his wrath is directed against Desdemona until the very end. To Iago, who is a different sort of person altogether, love, friendship, virtue, reputation are all wretched trifles prized only by fools. and are to be valued only in so far as they can be used for furthering self-interest. His numerous comments before Roderigo and Cassio make this plain. His incredibly devious designs are directed towards the destruction of the universally admired Moorish general Othello, that "egregious ass" whom he intends to "lead by the nose", and against Cassio, that "bookish theorist" with "mere prattle without practice" whom Othello has chosen to be his lieutenant in preference to himself. He has no animus against Desdemona ; only he counts her murder as a necessary link in his plot. Shakespeare's Iago, then, represents some of the worst features of the new world of ruthless bourgeois emulation that was building up around him¹⁰. Yet it would appear that Shakespeare created Iago more out of his deep intuition of life—as was his wont—rather than out of any clear social consciousness. He hardly seems to be aware of the deep social implication of the *kind* of evil he has so marvellously portrayed in Iago. That is why, however spine-chilling Iago's devilry might be, it remains in the play an individual phenomenon without

prompting disturbing questions about the meaning of things. It remains a central dark blot without darkening up the whole landscape of life, as happens in the Problem Plays, where the dramatically unrelieved pressure of the obsession needs special "choric" characters—Ulysses, Thersites, the Duke, Lucio—to vent itself. *Othello* needs no such extra choric voices: its entire meaning has been conveyed by purely dramatic means.

It is because the evil is understood and identified and found mainly confined to a single person that it has been possible for Shakespeare's imagination to weave this vision of evil into a rich and flawless work of art. His coming upon this one-villain-ruled story in Cinthio at this stage of his development might also have had something to do with the creation of this perfect gem of tragic art at a time when his mind was occupied with darkly confused thoughts about human evil, as the Problem Plays so amply attest. In *Othello* Shakespeare was able, just for once in his mature years, to confine the most malignant evil to the mind and actions of a single callous, conscienceless villain, and so to drown for the moment all the confused questionings about evil that had been torturing his mind since the days of *Hamlet*. But this was only a passing moment. He created in this moment his most perfect tragic masterpiece. He was to create greater tragedies afterwards, but never such a thing of rounded felicity again. The two colossal tragedies he wrote later are both cosmic and chaotic, and breathe the deepest spirit of questioning about the meaning of evil and the total meaning of things.

We note with no small wonder that these two kinds of vision, the harmonized tragic vision and the chaotic vision of human baseness and frailty, operated through some strange duality of mind in more or less separate and independent spells. The sequence—"Hamlet", *Troilus, All's well*, "Othello", *Measure for Measure*—would show that the two kinds of vision appeared almost in alternating waves hardly affecting one another, and each, while occupying the front of the poet's mind, obscuring the other like the eclipsing binaries in the astronomical world.

Such a duality, of course, could not persist for long, and the two visions had soon to come to grips, creating through their interpenetration two supreme masterpieces which would take Shakespeare to the extreme limit of his tragic vision.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The chronology of the plays assumed here and later on in this piece is in general agreement with some of the most important works on the subject, viz, E. K. Chambers' *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts & Problems* (2 vols, 1930) and Peter Alexander's *Introductions to Shakespeare* (1964) and *Shakespeare's Life & Art* (rev. ed. 1964). Besides, this is the sort of sequence that appears to emerge from the present author's interpretation of the Shakespearean evolution.
2. The beautifully balanced Plutarch-based tragedy of *Julius Caesar*, which hardly contains any serious touch of evil and which was followed by the two idyllic comedies, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, coming between it and *Hamlet*, may perhaps be looked upon as a sort of prelude to the Great Tragic Period.
3. Since this is a study of an evolutionary process, I would request the reader to look up in this context my two essays forming the preceding links in the study: *The Dual Vision in Hamlet* and *Shakespeare's Problem Plays: Alternation of a Negative Vision* (Cal. Univ., Journal of the English Department Vol. XVI No. 1, 1980-81 and Vol. XVII No. 2, 1981-82 respectively).
4. Even if the actual sequence of composition was slightly different, the general picture would be basically the same.
5. No serious student of *Othello* can fail to be impressed with the powerful and beautiful exposition of this point in the first part of G. Wilson Knight's *The Othello Music*, though, of course, the present author cannot agree with his symbolical interpretations in the later part of the essay.
6. A complete lack of understanding of this essential feature of this play is illustrated by W. H. Auden's comment: "Both in his happiness at the beginning and his cosmic despair later, Othello reminds one more of Timon than of Leontes." ("The Joker in the Pack", *The Dyer's Hand & Other Essays*, 1962) Quite obviously, Othello is like neither. Both his individuality and his specific development suggest Shakespeare's concretely realistic approach to life's phenomena at the moment,
7. A very significant term used by Theodore Watts-Dunton in categorizing the highest type of poetic imagination in the early part of his work *Poetry & the Renaissance of Wonder*.
8. The absurdity of framing up a totally symbolical interpretation of *Othello* (presumably with the purpose of saying something startlingly new) is illustrated by the comments of Alvin Kernan: "This passage from Venice to Cyprus to fight the Turk and encounter the forces of barbarism is the geographical form of an action that occurs on the social and psychological levels as well ... *Othello* offers a variety of interrelated symbols that locate and define in historical, natural, social, moral and human terms those qualities of being and universal forces that

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are forever at war in the universe and between which tragic man is always in movement." (Introduction to *Othello*, The Signet Classic Shakespeare, 1963) A sensitive and discerning reader who has no desire to show off might wonder if some nebulous comments on *King Lear* had by some weird mistake got applied to *Othello*.

9. That is to say, *Hamlet* too is a great tragedy in which the overall harmony of the tragic design prevails over the chaotic overtones of negative feelings which, paradoxically, deepen and enrich the tragic effect.
10. A. V. Lunacharsky brilliantly analyses the social significance of the type of evil represented by Iago in his essay *Bacon and the Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* compiled in "Lunacharsky on Literature and Art" (Moscow) and also in "Shakespeare in the Soviet Union" (Moscow).

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THE APOLOGY OF JONATHAN SWIFT

ANJANA BASU

THACKERAY, describing *Gulliver's Travels* in his *Letters*, wrote that, in the book :

man is utterly wicked, desperate, and imbecile, and his passions are monstrous, and his boasted power mean, that he is and deserves to be the shame of brutes, and his ignorance is better than his vaunted reason....¹

Thackeray found this image of man unbearable. He denounced Swift, and said of his language :

It is Yahoo language, a monster gibbering shrieks, and imprecations against mankind...filthy in word, filthy in thought, furious, raging, obscene....²

He implored the ladies of his acquaintance not to read Swift, and pronounced him an 'insane misanthrope', or words to that effect.

This charge of misanthropy was to remain until well into the twentieth century. It was felt that Swift, among the satirists, displayed signs of an unjustifiable viciousness, and that Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels* bore eloquent testimonial to this viciousness. Samuel Monk in an essay entitled *The Pride of Lemuel Gulliver* wrote :

The legend of Swift as a savage, mad, embittered misanthrope largely rests upon this wrong-headed, sensational reading of the last voyage.³

This is no place to defend the last voyage, but one feels inclined to point out that if Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels* is detached from its context and the sentiments expressed in the voyage attributed to Jonathan Swift instead of Lemuel Gulliver then it does appear very difficult to acquit Swift of the charge of misanthropy. The language is violent⁴ and the man-Yahoo equation convincingly disgusting :

He said the Yahoos were known to hate one another more than they did any different species of animals...the dissensions of the brutes in his country were owing to the same cause with ours, as I had described them.⁵

The result appears to make nonsense of the statement made by Porphyry that man is a rational being and that it is his rationality that separates him from the animals.⁶

The eighteenth century placed an even higher value on reason, since the Deists felt that it was man's reason that guided him into the path of virtue and made him a better Christian. We have such statements as Bolingbroke's :

(God) has made us happy, and he has put it into our power to make ourselves happier by a due use of our reason, which leads us to the practice of moral virtue and of all the duties of society.⁷

In opposition to this we have Swift's :

he looked upon us as a sort of animals, to whose share, by what accident he could not conjecture, some small pittance of reason had fallen, whereof we made no other use than, by its assistance, to aggravate our natural corruptions, and to acquire new ones which Nature has not given us.⁸

What Swift appears to be saying is that man, very far from being a godlike reasoning being, is a nasty, mean animal. And this, whether taken in terms of eighteenth-century Deism, Victorian complacency, or twentieth-century individualism, is an offensive statement. It is, in short, a blow to man's pride.

And this attack on man's pride is not confined solely to Book IV, though the attack is at its strongest there, with the inversion of the man-animal myth, where man, the supposed 'animale rationale' is confronted literally with a rational animal and, as a result, loses all sense of his identity ; it is found in the other books as well. In Books I and II, Swift uses the medium of size to expose man's false illusions about himself. He first takes Gulliver to the land of Lilliputians, where Gulliver finds himself physically superior to the diminutive inhabitants of the land, and then to Brobdingnag where Gulliver finds himself dwarfed. Kathleen Williams writes :

The satiric basis of the voyages to Lilliput and Brobdingnag is the conception known as relative size — man is seen more clearly and with more detachment when seen from a far lower or higher physical position.⁹

She goes on to say that this use of relative size stemmed from the eighteenth-century discoveries of the telescope and the microscope

and had been used by other writers—Voltaire, for example—but that Swift was the first to realise that it could be used to ‘shock the moral vision of man’.¹⁰

And this shock is caused by turning man inside out—first by expanding him, then by shrinking him, and lastly by taking him to an utopia of reason where the rulers are not human in shape so that in trying to identify himself with them he is forced to attempt to try and change his skin. Book III does not fit into this pattern of size and shape but is instead an attack on the attempts of philosophers to transcend reality, which is fairly conventional in its conception. But all the four books, no matter what the method used, constitute an attack on man’s conception of himself, and of his much-vaunted reason.

The similarity with another who was called a sceptic and not a misanthrope is very striking. If Swift’s violence in attacking man’s reason and man’s pride is to be labelled misanthropy, then so, surely should Montaigne’s. For in the *Apology of Raymond Sebonde* he says that his intention is to

crush and spurn under foot pride and human arrogance ; to make them sensible of the inanity, vanity, and vileness of man ; to wrest the wretched arms of their reason out of their hands ; to make them bow down and bite the ground under the authority and reverence of the Divine Majesty.¹¹

This would seem to be more or less a definition of Swift’s aims in *Gulliver’s Travels*, since Swift is attacking man’s pride in his reason, and his assumption of superiority to all other beings.

Man’s position is constantly under attack in *Gulliver’s Travels*. In Book I, Gulliver finds himself confronted with intrigues of the diminutive Lilliputians, and the comment that the King of the Brobdingnagians makes suffices to sum up Swift’s attitude in Book I as well as in Book II :

he observes how contemptible a thing was human grandeur, which could be mimicked by such diminutive insects as I.¹²

The industry and intrigues of the Lilliputians mimick and mock the intrigues and politics of the Gulliver-sized society. as Gulliver in turn appears to mimick the society of the Brobdingnagians Swift

makes Gulliver comment on this at the beginning of the second Voyage, though Gulliver is blind to the moral dimensions :

Undoubtedly philosophers are in the right when they tell us that nothing is great or little otherwise than by comparison. It might have pleased fortune to let the Lilliputians find some nation where the people were as diminutive with respect to them as they were to me.¹³

In Lilliput, Gulliver is a giant, and is shown to his best advantage. He refrains from hurting the Lilliputians even though he is tempted to do so on several occasions. The only fault that he can be accused of is gullibility. He is much impressed by the Lilliputian Emperor, and gratified by the marks of favour displayed to him, and this despite the Emperor's doll-like size. He also takes entirely seriously the charge of adultery with the treasurer's lady, which is laid against him by the treasurer. This in itself is enough to indict his reason, for to a reasonable man, the Lilliputians and their intrigues could never appear other than totally absurd.

As for the Lilliputians, they are shown as recognizably human, for their behaviour is a parody of accepted court and political behaviour. The King of Brobdingnag's comment on Gulliver is equally applicable to them :

I dare engage these creatures have their titles and distinctions of honour, they contrive little nests and burrows that they call houses and cities ; they make a figure in dress and equipage ; they love, they fight, they dispute, they cheat, they betray.¹⁴

The Lilliputians take themselves very seriously, but because of their size, their activities appear absurd. They are toys that Gulliver can pick up and put into his pocket :

I have often had four coaches and horses at once on my table full of company, while I sat on my chair, leaning my face towards them.¹⁵

but, at the same time, they are vicious and capable of treachery, as Gulliver later discovers :

The treasurer and admiral insisted that you should be put to the most painful and ignominious death, by setting fire on your house at night, and the general was to attend with twenty thousand men armed with poisonous arrows to shoot you on the face and hands.¹⁶

If in Book I, therefore, the reader identifies himself with the Lilliputians—as he might well do because they are seemingly human in shape and activity—then he will discover that to do so is to consent to treachery and absurdity. To identify oneself with Gulliver on the other hand, is to discover oneself taking the pretensions of the Lilliputians seriously, and to comparing a doll Emperor with a normal-sized Emperor and treating him with due reverence—which is slightly absurd though not morally culpable.

In Book II, on the other hand, Gulliver becomes Lilliputian and loses the advantages of size and moral stature. For Book II deepens the attack on man's pride. Again, according to principles laid out in Montaigne's *Apology* :

Let us then, for once, consider a man alone, without foreign assistance, and only with his own proper arms... Let him make me understand, by the force of his reason, upon what foundations he has built those great advantages he thinks he has over other creatures...¹⁷

This is the challenge that is put to Gulliver most explicitly in Books II and IV. In Book I he is alone and ‘without foreign assistance’, but he is manifestly superior to the Lilliputians in size and strength. His position does not need defending in Book I. But in Book II and Book IV he is definitely presented at a physical disadvantage, and the question is put to him—‘What is man?’ It might be differently phrased in the two books but the essence is the same.

In Book II, especially, Swift takes up the question of what advantages man ‘thinks he has over other creatures’, and he discovers that man alone in a foreign clime, according to Montaigne's specifications, has none. Gulliver is kidnapped by a monkey who mistakes him for ‘a young one of his own species’, endangered by a toad, attacked by a wasp, and mauled by a bird—all of which reduces to nothing man's avouched superiority over the animal kingdom and over nature, and calls to mind Montaigne's long passage in the *Apology* on the fallacy of imagining that animals are irrational beings and are inferior to man.

There is the passage on the sagacious dog, the lovelorn elephant, the ass who attempted to relieve himself of his burden of salt

by diving into the river, and the famous example of Montaigne's cat :

who mayhap, gains more pleasure from playing with me and who,
perchance, thinks that I am there for that express purpose...¹⁸

Swift provides his own examples of animal behaviour—brute animal behaviour in Book II, the 'rational animal' appears only in Book IV—and demonstrates Gulliver's inferiority under the given conditions. He also provides a long passage of commentary, supposedly from a book read by Glumdalclitch's nurse :

This writer went through all the usual topics of European moralists, showing how diminutive, contemptible, and helpless an animal was man in his own nature; how unable to defend himself from the inclemencies of the air, or the fury of wild beasts; how much he was excelled by one creature in speed, by a third in foresight, by a fourth in industry.¹⁹

The origins of this passage go back to Montaigne and St Augustine. Gulliver, however, does not recognize the weight of theological authority, but despises the passage and, with typical human pride, comments that the book :

is in little esteem, except among the women and the vulgar.²⁰

whereas, if he had truly used his reason he would have realised that he had been exposed to 'the fury of wild beasts' and had failed to defend himself adequately.

He also fails to defend his position 'by the force of his reason'. He is granted a tolerant auditor in the person of the King, and he attempts to prove the superiority of European civilisation to him. But after listening to all that he has to say, the King's reaction is :

you have clearly proved that ignorance, idleness, and vice are the proper ingredients for qualifying a legislator: that laws are best explained, interpreted and applied by those whose interests and abilities lie in perverting, confounding, and eluding them. I observe among you some lines of an institution which, in its original, might have been tolerable; but these half erased, and the rest wholly blurred and blotted by corruptions²¹

This result is repeated in Houyhnhnm land. Gulliver, again at a physical disadvantage, attempts to define human civilisation and he fails again. Admittedly, in Book IV, he presents a disillusioned

picture of the human race, but it produces a similar result to that produced in Book II :

my discourse had increased his abhorrence of the whole species...it gave him a disturbance of mind, to which he was wholly a stranger before.²³

This is the pronouncement of a 'rational animal' on man, the supposed rational animal. And it is obvious that Swift does not agree with the common eighteenth-century definition ; otherwise, he would have given his rational animals human shape, as Foigny gave to his seven-foot reasoning hermaphrodites²⁴. The shock is for man and for Gulliver. In a land that functions by reason, Gulliver discovers that the chief inhabitants are not human at all and that he is classed with the irrational 'animal' element. The shock is too much for his pride, and the result is that he is alienated from himself and from human society. He returns to England, ceases to associate with his family and his friends, and seeks the company of two colts whose gait and whinny he attempts to imitate, thus manifestly proving himself to be an irrational being, for he cannot tell an ordinary horse from a Houyhnhnm and thus confounds exterior with interior, taking the outside of an object for the essence of an object :

My horses understand me tolerably well : I converse with them at least four hours every day...they live in great amity with me, and friendship to each other.²⁵

By the end of *Gulliver's Travels* we discover that man has no right to be proud of his reason, for Swift has demonstrated that he functions more by his pride than by his reason and that despite his pride and his so-called intellectual powers, he is unable to prove his superiority to any other living being—the whole, if one chooses to put it fancifully, being a sermon on Montaigne's text in the *Apology of Raymond Sebond*. Swift's aim is the same as Montaigne's—to expose human pride and presumption. He does not define man's vice as Montaigne does, but he demonstrates it in action. Montaigne writes that :

Presumption is our natural and original disease. The most wretched and frail of all creatures is man, and withal the proudest. He feels and sees himself lodged here in the dirt and filth of the world, nailed and rivetted to the worst and deadest part of the universe...and yet his imagination will be placing himself above the circle of the moon...²⁶

and Swift shows us the results of human presumption. He presents Gulliver offering an impudent alliance to the King of Brobdingnag, despite his diminutive size :

In hopes to ingratiate myself further into his Majesty's favour,
I told him of an invention...to make a certain powder, into a heap
of which the smallest spark falling, would kindle the whole...
That I knew the ingredients very well, which were cheap and common
...This I humbly offered to his Majesty...²⁶

He offers the King the knowledge of guns and gunpowder, and the King is shocked :

He was amazed how so impotent and grovelling an insect as I (these
were his expressions) could entertain such inhuman ideas.²⁷

Gulliver, on the other hand, cannot understand why the King is so shocked, for the King's reaction is quite contrary to accepted notions in Europe, and it is obvious that he considers the Brobdingnagians to be far inferior to the Europeans :

A strange effect of narrow principles and short views ! that a prince
possessed of every quality which procures veneration, and esteem ;
of strong parts, great wisdom, and profound learning...and almost
adored by his subjects, should, from a nice unnecessary scruple,
whereof in Europe we can have no conception, let slip an opportunity
put into his hands that would have made him absolute master of the
lives, the liberties, and the fortunes of his people.²⁸

This passage is a masterpiece of condescension and incomprehension on Gulliver's part. He fails to recognise that the King's reaction is the only possible Christian reaction. Instead he goes on to discourse further how an English reader's estimation of the King will be lessened by this. This, Swift states indirectly, is the presumption of man, who thinks himself the master of the universe. And Montaigne writes of the same creature :

he equals himself to God, attributes to himself divine qualities,
withdraws and separates himself from the crowd of other creatures,
cuts out the shares of the animals, his fellows and his companions,
and distributes to them portions of faculties and force as he thinks
fit.²⁹

Book III forms a digression in this attack on human presumption, for in that book Gulliver is shown as a voyager, a sort of guide to the strange regions that he visits. Instead, the achievements of the human intellect are attacked in the figures of the Laputans, and in

the Grand Academy of Lagado. There is also an attack on man's desire for immortality—an attack that is based ultimately on a statement made by Plato and refuted by St Augustine in Book XIII, Chapter XVI of *De Civitate Dei*⁸⁰, and Plato's 'lesser Gods' who are promised immortality, are satirized in the figure of the Struldbrugs who are chosen by a black mole on the face and who are terrifying in their age and jealousy. Montaigne has similar attacks to make on the classical philosophers, for the conclusion that he reaches is that man knows nothing, for—

Theophrastus said that human knowledge guided by the senses, might judge the causes of things to a certain degree, but that being arrived at first and extreme causes, it must stop short and retire.⁸¹

Swift is not as logical as Montaigne in Book III but he attempts to reveal the uselessness of man's philosophy by demonstrating how far it is detached from ordinary everyday life. The happiest man in Balnibarbi is Count Munodi who does not conform to the dictates of the Grand Academy but who will be forced to do so lest he is accused of treason. Gulliver has no comments to make in the Book. He merely wanders through, noting how the classical philosophers have been mistaken in their assumptions.

The four Books demonstrate the futility of human knowledge and of human pride. There are no answers given and the end is dark—Gulliver with his horses dismissing man as Yahoo while overlooking the fact that he himself is indisputably part of the same race. Montaigne points out that the truest knowledge that man can profess to have is a knowledge of himself—to realise that he knows nothing so that he can rely on Divine Grace to bring him to Salvation—and that he can only be brought to this realisation once he has been robbed of his pride in his reason. One cannot say that Swift's Gulliver has been brought to this realisation. He has been robbed of his belief in man's superiority and the result is that he feels he must take refuge with the beasts, for a beast has shown itself to be superior to man in reason.

The only means by which we can guess that Swift's aim is similar to Montaigne's is by examining the figures of the King of Brobdingnag and Don Pedro. Swift states his approval of the King—albeit grudgingly in the person of Gulliver in Book IV—and

demonstrates his approval of Don Pedro by minutely describing his conduct to the mad Gulliver. This, it is implied, is what man at his best can be —humane, humble, and sympathetic. And both are displayed as Christian figures—for though the King's religion is not mentioned, yet the fact that Brobdingnagian moralists share the same mode of thought as European moralists suggests that they might share also the same mode of religion. Gulliver, in comparison, is ordinary man and Montaigne's opinion of ordinary man is the same as Swift's :

Can any thing be imagined, so ridiculous, that this miserable and wretched creature, who is not so much master of himself, but subject to the injuries of all things, should call himself master and emperor of the world... ?³³

Swift does not definitely state that Gulliver cannot become like the King or Don Pedro. He reserves judgment. He merely hints that there might be hope for Gulliver, for he has the wit to realise that :

amongst the least corrupted are the Brobdingnagians, whose wise maxims, in morality and government, it would be our happiness to observe. ³⁴

and if he can realise this then there is hope for him.³⁴

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THE MERCHANT OF VENICE AND THE WORLD OF COMMERCE

BIRENDRANATH CHOWDHURY

I

THE Merchant has not met the same neglect suffered by the comedies as a group. With the exception of Hamlet and Falstaff, no other character has raised such animated discussions as Shylock. Always a favourite with the audience, the play has a fascinating stage-history. The legality of Portia's defence provoked close scrutiny by experts, and the theatre-managers and actors cut freely into the text in their bid to present either an unmitigated villain or a tragic hero. Parts of the play like Shylock's burning denunciation of the persecution of his race, the passages on justice and mercy and Lorenzo's rhapsody on love, music and order in the moonlit Belmont garden have been treasured in people's memory down the centuries.

Despite all this, an unending line of percipient critics, from Nicholas Rowe¹ onwards, have reacted unfavourably to the dramatic texture and total impression of the play. The artistic problem facing A. C Bradley, W. A. Raleigh, A. T. Quiller-Couch, H. B. Charlton and others is, as they suggest in different ways, a lack of harmony between the pronounced tragic traits of Shylock's character and the exigencies of the comic retribution. A few examples will bring this out. Bradley's charge, made in a passing reference to the play, is :

One reason why the end of *The Merchant of Venice* fails to satisfy us is that Shylock is a tragic character and that we cannot believe in his accepting his defeat and the conditions imposed on him.*

I am grateful to my teacher, Sri Jyoti Bhattacharya, who has kindly offered some valuable suggestions.

For the quotations and references, *Shakespeare, Complete Works*, ed. P. Alexander, 1964, has been used throughout.

As for explanation, Bradley adds :

This was a case where Shakespeare's imagination ran away with him, so that he drew a figure with which the destined pleasant ending would not harmonize.³

Charlton's argument, though elaborate, mainly rests on Bradley's. Prompted by his personal prejudice against the Jews, Shakespeare the man, he writes, set out to 'gratify his own patriotic pride of race' by exhibiting 'his Shylock as an inhuman scoundrel', but his intentions were defeated once he became possessed by the creative fury and Charlton concludes :

There is throughout the clash of rival schemes, the proposals of Shakespeare's deliberate will, and the disposals of his creative imagination.⁴

E. E. Stoll's 'historical' criticism of Shylock published earlier⁵ proved ineffective as an antidote against such excesses of character-criticism in the 'thirties. Since the 'forties, however, some attempts have been made by eminent critics, especially J. Palmer, J. R. Brown, C. L. Barber and J. D. Wilson, at revaluation of *The Merchant*. Wilson's rejoinder to Charlton is amusing :

...we have heard more than enough of the impersonal, almost witless, imaginative growth, exfoliating plays and poems without premeditation or reflection, as a gourd-vine produces pumpkins.⁶

Yet, it is not hard to find the old charge renewed even in very recent criticism⁷. It is the object of this article to study the form and meaning of the play in particular relation to that charge. In the interpretation of Shakespeare, novelty is its own condemnation⁸; we only hope to be able to trace some new relations of certain historical facts and critical points established by scholars, past and present.

II

First, to set the perspective. As is our common experience, Shakespeare's comedies coalesce different comic traditions (classical, medieval and renaissance), distant places and periods of history, and often break down the traditional barriers between the tragic and comic modes. Besides, though some technical features of construction are common to the comedies, each of these bodies forth a markedly separate vision, a vision that reconciles both the

laughable and the serious. We may say after L. C. Knights⁹ that there is no distilled essence of the comedies, and we should approach each on the effect it creates. We also presume that character-creation is subservient to the total dramatic design ; it is 'a prismatic breaking-up of the comprehensive vision of the play'.¹⁰

Secondly, we would stress the overtly commercial environs of *The Merchant* which seem not to have received due attention from the majority of the critics. Apart from its title, some other aspects — images, themes and characters — require, we think, cross-references to the sixteenth century world of commerce. The discovery of the New World, the inflow of the Spanish-American treasure and the profits of oriental trade accelerated the pace of capital accumulation in Europe. As for England, the triumph of nationalism, the expanding woollen-textile industry, the booming cloth export up to 1550, the plunder of Spanish bullion during the last quarter of the century chiefly by Drake under Elizabeth's not-so-secret patronage, the large opportunities for investment created by 'profit inflation' (J. M. Keynes' phrase), and, above all, the redirection of international trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic contributed most to England's commercial expansion and prosperity. Though a late starter in the race of transatlantic commercial ventures, she overtook Spain whose imperial possessions had grown too large for consolidation, and the hegemony of world trade passed from Venice via Spain to the new entrepot, London. Shakespeare's society, especially London, was growing increasingly mercantile, and the strain and stress of the transition pervades his works. The bourgeoisie had a new set of values which were at work in this commercial revolution. They cut religion (*summum bonum* in the middle ages) down to size, sacrificed traditional values like free-lending, hospitality, social festivity, solidarity, etc. on the altar of gain. Critics and editors have taken pains to detect in *The Merchant* allusions to contemporary England. The line, 'Upon your charter and your city's freedom' (IV. i 39) applies not to the Venetian Republic but to the English boroughs. This led Wilson to brand the entire passage as unShakespearian and this, in its turn, provoked a fitting reply from J. M. Murry.¹¹ There is mention of the 'wealthy Andrew' (I. i. 27), a Spanish galleon captured at Cadiz in 1596. Nor had Venice any direct oversea trade with 'Mexico'

and 'India' (III. ii. 270 ff.). But these are mere externals, and any attempt to identify Venice with London by these will require Fluellen's logic (*Henry V*, IV. vii 22 ff.). G. K. Hunter has drawn our attention to Robert Wilson's late Morality, *The Three Ladies of London* (c. 1581). It 'focuses neatly the observed relationship between Venice and London', suggests that the latter has usurped the position of the former and uses Venice as a type-name for "the commercial society". Hunter also shows that, "the acquisitive instinct" is the dominating force in the Venetian society recreated by Jonson in *Volpone*.¹⁸ Despite certain basic differences, Shakespeare also portrays Venice as a typically acquisitive society. Significantly enough, the imagined historical period of the action of his play is uncertain, and its ethos, we would try to illustrate, is applicable equally, if not more, to London.

III

To begin with the imagery related to commerce. *The Merchant* opens with Antonio's 'want-wit sadness' (I.6) which Salerio attributes to his worries about the safe return of his ships :

Your mind is tossing on the ocean ;
There where your argosies, with portly sail —
Like signiors and rich burghers on the flood,
Or as it were the pageants of the sea —
Do overpeer the petty traffickers,
That curtsy to them, do them reverence,
As they fly by them with their woven wings.

(I. i. 8 ff.)

Obviously, Salerio wants to raise the drooping spirits of the 'royal merchant' and contrasts in vivid colours his wealth and position with those of the rest of the Venetian merchants who are his vassals, so to speak. It reads much like an epic simile in that the action is held up as the mind broods on its loveliness. While the stately ships move on, the giant waves rock the lesser vessels overtaken by them. We visualize the seascape and feel the gusto of the sensuous description. C. F. E. Spurgeon, who is less mindful of the dramatic matrices of the images, recalls in this connection 'the rich and portly burghers, with proud and dignified gait, staring blandly unseeing over the

heads of the lesser folk'¹³ in London streets. Compare this with what W. H. Clemen makes of it :

As an introduction to the whole play these images are of the greatest importance : they immediately produce the atmosphere of sea, ships and well-to-do merchants in which the play moves ; with their reference to the dangers of trading by sea, they strike the keynote of the play.¹⁴

The metaphor of the 'tossing mind' in 1.8 has been reinforced by Solanio's

... had I such venture forth,
The better part of my affections would
Be with my hopes abroad. I should be still
Plucking the grass to know where sits the wind,
Peering in maps for ports, and piers, and roads ;
And every object that might make me fear
Misfortune to my ventures, out of doubt,
Would make me sad.

(15 ff.)

That is merchants' 'humour' bodied forth in characteristic details. The cue is taken by Salerio whose images contribute as much to characterization as to the creation of the play's milieu :

My wind, cooling my broth,
Would blow me to an ague when I thought
What harm a wind too great might do at sea.
I should not see the sandy hour-glass run
But I should think of shallows and of flats,
And see my wealthy Andrew dock'd in sand,
Vailing her high top lower than her ribs
To kiss her burial. Should I go to church
And see the holy edifice of stone,
And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,
Which, touching but my gentle vessel's side,
Would scatter all her spices on the stream,
Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks,
And, in a word, but even now worth this,
And now worth nothing ?

(22 ff.)

Of the two dominant pictures (bleak trade-hazards and gorgeous ships full of precious merchandise) the first overshadows the second this time and shows merchants' obsession with 'profit and loss'. Salerio's joke is at the expense of his own class, and the linking

of 'holy edifice of stone' and 'dangerous rocks' is ironical. As mentioned above, this is how the bourgeoisie worshipped both Mammon and God on the same altar. Spurgeon cites this passage as an instance of 'association of ideas' working in the speaker's mind without adding a single word on their connection with social experience.¹⁵ To Clemen, it is irony, conveying a vague suggestion of the impending miscarriage of Antonio's ships.¹⁶ Barber's comment on ll. 32-34 is also worth pausing over :

The destruction of what is cherished, of the civic and personal, by ruthless impersonal forces is sensually immediate in the wild waste of shining silk on turbulent water, one of the magic, summary lines of the play.¹⁷

Listen to Salerio once again :

Why, yet it lives there uncheck'd that Antonio hath a ship of rich lading wreck'd on the narrow seas ; the Goodwins I think they call the place, a very dangerous flat and fatal, where the carcases of many a tall ship lie buried, as they say —

(III. i 2 ff.)

Thus hazards of oversea trade recur as a motif in a considerable number of images. Even mere collocation of trade centres figures forth hectic commercial activities carried on by the merchant venturers around the world :

But is it true, Salerio ?
Hath all his ventures fail'd ? What, not one hit ?
From Tripolis, from Mexico, and England,
From Lisbon, Barbary, and India,
And not one vessel scape the dreadful touch
Of merchant-marring rocks ?

(III. ii 268 ff.)

Another important aspect of the play's imagery involves the iterative use of commerce analogues of love. As is well known, the discovery of the unexplored territories abounding with precious merchandise and bullion fired the imagination of the Renaissance poets and dramatists who often likened love to mercantile voyage and usury in earnest as well as in jest.¹⁸ In 1939 Mark Van Doren noticed the close link between love and money in the poetry of *The Merchant*.¹⁹ But here we owe most to Brown whose treatment of the subject is so thorough and illuminating that it deserves mention at some length. He analyses the pervasive love-usury association in

Shakespeare's first seventeen sonnets (as printed first), shows how the idea of love's wealth runs through *Romeo and Juliet* to the romantic comedies, and comments, after a close study of numerous textual details of *The Merchant*, that this idea is more dominant here than in the rest of the comedies. According to Brown, though love's wealth is qualitatively different from commercial wealth (in its mutuality, freedom, generosity, sacrifice and the like), it informs part of the play's imagery and links up Venice and Belmont in a way. He observes :

The comparison of the two usuries (one of Shylock, another of Portia and Bassanio) is part of a more general comparison of commerce and love which is likewise maintained throughout the play.²⁰

Not only Bassanio's talk of the venture for the 'golden fleece' (Portia) releases the spring of action, both of them call up a good many metaphors from the world of commerce particularly when they exchange their love. Out of several instances cited by Brown we select only two. Just after Bassanio has made the right choice, he takes out of the leaden casket the scroll which tells him to 'claim' his lady 'with a loving kiss'. He approaches Portia speaking thus :

A gentle scroll. Fair lady, by your leave ;
I come by note, to give and to receive.

(III. ii. 139-40)

To 'come by note' meant to present one's bill or I.O.U. Overwhelmed with joy Bassanio cannot be sure of his success until the scroll is 'confirm'd, sign'd and ratified' by Portia (l. 148). For Bassanio's sake she wishes to be

A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich,
That only to stand high in your account
I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,
Exceed account.

(155-8)

However exalted their love may be, its expression has thus the ring of business transactions. Brown has also pointed to the repeated use of some other words and expressions like 'excess' (meaning usury), 'full sum', 'sum', 'term in gross', 'converted', 'dear', 'bought', 'bargain', etc. in III. ii.²¹

To turn now to Bassanio's voyage of love.²² As to his motive for paying court to the Lady of Belmont (l. i. 122ff.), Shakespeare's

deviation from his source material is significant. Giannetto, his counterpart in *Il Pecorone*, starts his mercantile voyage without any thought of love or marriage. By chance his ship reaches the Belmont port and he comes to know about the caprice of the beautiful enchantress (a widow) ruling over the place. The prospect of adventurous love greatly excites him ; he forgets all about profit and loss ; takes one desperate chance after another until he is able, as required, to enjoy and win her over.²³ Though we should not brand Bassanio a fortune-hunter as some 'gentlemen critics of independent income'²⁴ have done, it will be no less a mistake to overlook the profit motive in his initial quest for Portia. Wealth and love were (and are) complementary, and many of the Elizabethan aristocrats who were accustomed to sumptuous living often beyond their means, felt no qualms about mending their fortune by convenient marriages. Considered in this light, Bassanio's gamble for the rich heiress is not singular ; the mention of his boyish practice of shooting a second shaft in the hope of recovering the one lost earlier, is not 'windy nonsense'²⁵ either. But to resume. This is how the golden fleece image is employed thrice in the play :

Bassanio her sunny locks
 Hang on her temples like a golden fleece,
 Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strand,
 And many Jasons come in quest of her.

(I. i. 169-72)

Gratiano—We are the Jasons, we have won the fleece.

Salerio—I would you had won the fleece that he (Antonio) hath lost.

(III. ii. 243-4)

Read together, the excerpts make Portia's beauty and wealth inseparable. The magical property of the legendary fleece recedes into the background and Portia turns into an emblem of precious merchandise. Brown tells us that the golden fleece was a symbol of the fortunes for which merchants ventured and Drake was said to have brought back 'his golden fleece' after the circumnavigation²⁶

There is also Lorenzo voyaging for Jessica. The merchandise that the lover's enterprise readily brings forms part of the stage-imagery (Jessica dropping the casket, etc. in II. vi). More relevant

to our enquiry, however, is Gratiano's simile evoked by the unnatural delay in Lorenzo's arrival just before her elopement :

... All things that are
Are with more spirit chased than enjoy'd.
How like a younker or a prodigal
The scarfed bark puts from her native bay,
Hugg'd and embraced by the strumpet wind ;
How like a prodigal doth she return,
With over-weather'd ribs and ragged sails,
Lean, rent, beggar'd by the strumpet wind !

(II. vi. 12-9)

Apart from the ribald jest for which Gratiano is notorious, there is a sustained comparison between two voyages—one of love and another of commerce. The young lovers start their voyage as gaily and as fast as the beautifully decorated, trim, out-going merchant-vessels. But when the lovers return (after love is possessed) they resemble weather-beaten ships tottering on their way home. There is a sardonic hint at the staleness and cooling of conjugal attachment brought about by the young lovers' early exuberance (prodigality). Lorenzo's delay is a puzzle to love-psychology because he is about to begin his voyage. Structurally, the image also forebodes the impending catastrophe of Antonio's ships.²⁷

Mention should be made in passing of some other types of commerce images. The powerful stage-imagery of the play owes much to the world of commerce—settlement of the loan of three thousand ducats ; the broken bankrupt led along the street by the Gaoler feed by Shylock ; Shylock clamouring for his 'bond' with the 'scales' in his hands. 'Ring' (pledge of matrimonial bond) occurs 48 times in the play²⁸ and its reiteration makes the melodious Belmont unquiet for a while (23 times between ll. 146 and 270 in V. i.). Playing the shrew, Portia accuses Bassanio of violating their marriage-contract and denies his credit-worthiness. In his bid to heal up the quarrel Antonio, who is much embarrassed, says :

I once did *lend* my body for his *wealth*,
Which, but for him that had your husband's *ring*,
Had quite *miscarried*; I dare be *bound* again,
My soul upon the *forfeit*, that your lord
Will never more *break faith* advisedly.

(249-53)

There is a two-way movement in the passage. The commercial terminology brings back to the mind what has gone before and Antonio's intercession closes the fooling of the husbands as Portia finds him too good a 'surety' to be rejected.

Not much less significant is the part played by the auditory imagery in building up the commercial environment. It is a critical consensus today that the discordant voice of Venice has been opposed to the musical concord of Belmont. Shakespeare groups together a few words associated with business and law, and gets these repeated by his personae obviously for aural effect. These clusters conjure up hectic activities of the exchange-market where enormous gains and losses keep merchants rolling on Fortune's Wheel. Hence the anxious, repeated queries : 'What news on the Rialto ?' (I. iii. 33), 'Now, what news on the Rialto ?' (III. i. 1) and 'What news among the merchants ?' (III. i. 20). These reverberate in the mind and remind us of modern share-markets. Above all, Shylock's voice 'comes rasping into the play like a file'⁵⁹ as in 'He lends out money *gratis*' spoken twice with a malicious grin (I. iii. 39 & III. iii. 2). Besides, some of his lines flowing out of anger almost deafen us. One of the striking examples is, 'Let him look to his *bond*' (occurs thrice in III. i. 39-42) or 'I will have my *bond*' (four times in III. iii. 4-17) where his wrath reaches its crescendo in the explosive '*bond*'. Incidentally, '*bond*' occurs 35 times in the play and Shylock uses it more frequently than any other character.

IV

It is time now to turn to the themes related to commerce. Love, friendship, hatred, appearance and reality, justice and mercy, and music and discord are generally recognized as the dominant themes of the play. But to these must be added a few which are closely interrelated — usury in its varied aspects, trade-rivalry and thrift and prodigality. J. W. Draper and then E. C. Pettet brought into focus the interaction of Shakespeare's consciousness and the problem of usury which was uppermost in the transition from feudalism to capitalism.⁶⁰ It may be worthwhile in this connection to analyse the colloquy of Antonio and Shylock on the ethics of usury (I. iii. 64-91).

Antonio's brusque assertion that he neither lends nor borrows money at interest prompts Shylock to broach the centuries-old topic. The root of economic prosperity ('thrift') is, he says, the capacity to apply to the full one's labour and ingenuity to the management (husbandry) of whatever material resources one has. In the economic race nothing is unethical save theft, and Shylock exemplifies his point first by alluding to Rebecca's ('wise mother') tricking blind Isaac into blessing Jacob as his first-born (*Genesis*, xxvii) and then to Jacob's success in multiplying fast his share in Laban's stock of cattle by a manipulation made during their mating time (sticking peeled poplar rods before the ewes, *Genesis*, xxx). In plain words, when as blessed a patriarch as Jacob did not flinch to use his cunning for material advancement, why should a creditor hesitate to exploit the desperate needs of his customers? It is pointless, he means to say, to make pedantic distinctions of the barren and procreative in business affairs. In reply to Antonio's, 'Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?', he cutly says, 'I cannot tell; I make it breed as fast' (ll. 90-1). Antonio has no patience to understand the broad sense of the analogy, and accuses him in an aside (92ff.) of devilish distortion of the Scriptures. His lines, 'A breed for barren metal of his friend' (129) and 'Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?', echo the Aristotelian tag ⁸¹

Significantly, the Rebecca-Laban-Jacob passage has not yet been traced in the probable sources, and Charlton's suggestion that Shakespeare 'very likely took it confusedly from the old Jew play'⁸² is feeble conjecture. Right from the Sonnets through *Romeo* to *Timon* and *Lear*, there is a persistent concern with the usurer's profession, and in *The Merchant* Shakespeare chose to dramatize both the theoretical and practical aspects of the contemporary problem. The spendthrift nobility with fixed income from land, their dependants, the actors and players, and the poor peasants and workers who felt the pinch of the meteoric price-rise, were too familiar with the exactions of money-lenders who included the theatre-managers. Draper shows that the play's themes are not religion and race but conflicting economic ideals, that Shakespeare's unusual antipathy is directed not against a Jew as such, but against the typical money-lender who was at once so indispensable and so menacing to the Elizabethans.⁸³ Drawing most from R. H. Tawney's

editorial introduction to Thomas Wilson's *Discourse Upon Usury*, 1572, Pettet points out that a romantic comedy like *The Merchant* includes, singularly, among its themes, Shakespeare's rare consideration of a major socio-economic problem of his time. He argues that Antonio is represented as 'a symbol of the whole medieval attitude' and Shylock as 'the child of the new "cash-nexus"'. According to him, though the play denies an individual's absolute power over what he has paid for in hard cash, the contrary was the case in real life.⁸⁴

The avowed business policy of Shylock the money-lender is not hard to follow then, and as for practice, he, for one, will always perfect it. Antonio explains how he infuriated him by releasing the miserable debtors from his clutches (III. iii. 22-3). Of Shylock's two strong motives—racial hatred born out of persecution and trade rivalry (the two made almost inseparable by the great dramatist)—the former has been unduly emphasized, and it is here that the findings of Draper and Pettet come to our aid. Admittedly, 'I hate him for he is a Christian' (I. iii. 37) strikes us at once by its unusual force suggesting long-seated resentment. Nor can we help feeling at times how Shylock smarts under racial persecution. So deep is our involvement in that great speech beginning with 'To bait fish withal', (III. i. 45-62) that we often forget its end which is to justify murderous revenge.⁸⁵ The Duke's expectation of a gentle answer brings forth what may suggest 'fairy-tale hatred, of the bad for the good':⁸⁶

So can I give no reason, nor I will not,
More than a lodg'd hate and a certain loathing
I bear Antonio—

(IV. i. 59-61)

Shylock also complains of having bestial treatment from the Christians and we should as well take into account his oath for vengeance (III. iii. 5 & IV. i. 36 & 223). But however important, outraged Judaism alone cannot explain his thirst for Antonio's blood. As will be evident later, money is his God, 'means of living' his very life. Antonio hates and blocks his ambition for accumulation ; he is indeed a formidable rival to the extortioner. Trade-rivalry which recurs as a theme in a good many plays is central to *The Merchant* (cf., among others, *Errors*, I. i. 3 ff. ;

Shrew, IV. ii. 77 ff.; *Sir Thomas More*, II. iii. 132-153; *Twelfth Night*, III. iii. 26 ff. & V. i. 45 ff.). Religious hatred and trade-rivalry have been combined, as though chemically, in the portraiture of Shylock. Thus 'I hate him for he is a Christian' is immediately followed by :

But more for that in low simplicity
He lends out money gratis—

(I. iii. 38-9)

Not only Antonio brings down the rate of usance by free-lending, he rails on his 'well-won thrift' which he calls, to Shylock's resentment, 'interest'. Antonio has (if we take Shylock at his word) also 'hindered him half a million' and 'thwarted his bargains'. Once this arch-enemy is out of Venice, 'I can make what merchandise I will' (III. i. 113). This is also the import of

What if my house be troubled with a *rat*,
And I be pleas'd to give ten thousand ducats
To have it ban'd?

(IV. i. 44-6)

'Rat' is to him, if we recall, an association of trade-hazards ('there be land-rats, and water-rats', I. iii. 20).

The marked opposition of thrift and prodigality stemming from the play's conflicting economic ideals merits analysis. Traditional hospitality was one of the first casualties of rising capitalism; the acquisitive spirit led to drastic reduction of expenses both in house-keeping and estate-management; neighbourliness and social festivity fell into disuse. The clash of the old and new attitudes has left its mark in many plays (cf. Lear's 'O, reason not the need!', etc., II. iv. 263 ff.; the revenge taken by the cakes-and-ale party on the sober steward in *Twelfth Night*, and the picture of the prosperity and destruction of Timon's great household). In *The Merchant* we watch with admiration the Belmont Lady keeping open house much like Olivia. Her mind is the least 'mercenary'; with her 'god-like amity' she treats numerous inmates and guests of her house (none her relation) with utmost gentility and gladdens their hearts with timely jests. She is thus the symbol of the Renaissance lady whom all her acquaintances adore. Because he has partaken of the joys of living

in her house, her unnamed servant grows poetical⁸⁷ at the sight of the rich presents sent by Bassanio to her :

A day in April never came so sweet
To show how costly summer was at hand
As this fore-spurrer comes before his Jord.

(II. ix. 93-5)

Not to talk of Antonio, even the bankrupt Bassanio is exceedingly generous and that impels Launcelot 'To leave a rich Jew's service to become / The follower of so poor a gentleman' (II. ii. 134-5).

Shylock's 'sober house' stands out in sharp relief against Portia's. Enforced privation has turned it into a veritable hell and no wonder freedom (love's awakening as well) brings Jessica ecstatic joy at Belmont. She sees the world afresh like a miner coming out of the pit after day's toil, and lavishly praises the hostess. No doubt Shylock's miserliness is partly in the classical tradition — his obsession with money, the kill-joy aspect of his character and much else. While Launcelot protests against starving in his service, the usurer calls him a 'drone' and will not permit him to 'hive' with him. He is, says Shylock, 'snail- slow in profit', 'a huge feeder' and so on (II. v. 45ff.). Thus he appears a stock comic butt muttering, 'Fast bind, fast bind'. But Shakespeare gives him a chance to defend his 'well-won thrift', his desire to do what he likes with his own. Shylock's contempt for what he calls idleness, waste and frivolity comes out forcefully whenever he mentions the Christians. This hatred of the 'thrifty mind' for the prodigal was characteristic of the class-antagonism brought to the fore by the commercial revolution. The image of 'prodigality' is evoked time and again (we may think of the reports of the pleasure trip of Lorenzo and Jessica) in the play. To the bourgeoisie the criticism of their ways by men who, they thought, were incapable of managing their own affairs, amounted to impertinence and hence Shylock's exultation over Antonio's financial ruin :

. . . a bankrupt, a prodigal, who dare scarce show his head on the Rialto ; a beggar, that was us'd to come so smug upon the mart. Let him look to his bond. He was wont to call me usurer ; let him look to his bond—

(III. i. 37ff.)

Compare how the unnamed senator, though apprehensive for the recovery of his money lent, gloats over the expected misfortune of Timon :

...for I do fear,
When every feather sticks in his own wing,
Lord Timon will be left a naked gull,
Which flashes now a phoenix—
(II. i. 29-32)

Their ways have, supposedly, proved superior to those of the popular aristocrats and hence the grim satisfaction.

V

One or two traits of Shylock's personality deserve attention at this point. That he is essentially a comic character was first demonstrated very ably by Stoll³⁸ and then by Palmer, S. C. Sen Gupta³⁹ and others. Like Falstaff, with whom he has, temperamentally, very little in common, he is also a strange amalgam of diverse comic traditions and some features of contemporary social reality. In varying degrees Shylock resembles the miser and tyrant-father of the New Comedy, the Morality Vice in its wickedness and comicality, the Italianate Jew endowed by anti-Semitism with exotic fierceness, and the Elizabethan capitalist-financier ('Shylock' < Hebrew 'shalach'; in *AV* 'shalach' rendered as 'cormorant', traditional symbol of a usurer). While all these have gone into the making of this complex character, acquisitiveness and sense of persecution dominate the rest. The picture of Shylock crying out 'daughter' and 'ducats' in the same breath along the streets (echoing Barabas', 'O girl, O gold!', etc.), may be a malicious exaggeration by Solanio (II. viii. 12ff.). But after the monstrous wish he expresses for his dead daughter being hearsed at his foot with the jewels and ducats on her (III. i. 72ff.), his lament over the loss of the turquoise ring presented by Leah as a pledge of betrothal (ll. 104ff.), should not be sentimentalized. His conversation with Tubal (ll. 68-115) has been quoted by eminent critics as an instance of pure comedy in the manner of Jonson, Moliere and others.⁴⁰ The only debatable issue regarding the miser's conduct is the absence of any financial motive behind the flesh-bond (though 'rate' is mentioned once, I. iii. 99)

and his persistent refusal to accept the ever-increasing sum of ducats offered to him in the Trial scene. But this is not altogether inexplicable, for a miser is also a human being and though he is ruled by one master passion for accumulation, it does not necessarily exterminate other feelings. And once his spirit of revenge is roused to the full, he may forget for the occasion all about money. When he is balked of his pound of flesh, he forgets his oaths and stretches out his arm with, 'Pay the bond thrice' (IV. i. 314). In answer to Portia's challenge, he whimpers, 'Give me my principal' (330-1). It follows, therefore, that religion does not absorb him as intensely as profiteering, that he is not likely to die a martyr in the cause of Judaism. Henry Irving's ennobling of Shylock, his interpolation of a forlorn majestic figure knocking at the door of his empty house on his return from Bassanio's, have thrown some critics off their balance.⁴¹ Shylock harboured revenge on Antonio even before Jessica's apostasy and thievery worked like madness in his brain. Viewed from this angle, his punishment appears light in proportion to the guilt of attempted murder. Yet his final exit with 'Nay, take my life and all', etc. (IV. i. 369-72) is pathetic and somewhat embarrassing.

VI

And that brings us face to face with the grave charge of artistic disharmony in the play. Granting, for argument's sake, that Shakespeare's treatment is inconsistent, we may point out that this is not a singular case. While the rejection of Falstaff has disconcerted many as unduly hard, the treatment meted out to Bertram and Angelo has puzzled some the other way round. Secondly, it may be useful to remember that the characters owe their consistency not so much to psychology as to the broad, moral vision of the play. Some renowned critics of our own time — J. F. Danby, A. Sewell, H. Jenkins, A. P. Rossiter, K. Muir and A. Kettle, among others, have made some suggestive remarks on the Shakespearian dialectic.⁴² Rossiter, for example, shows that Shakespeare's intuitive way of thinking about man and society is dialectical, as contrasted with the old eristic argument aimed at the extinction of an opposite, that it is dynamic and alterative, based on the recognition of the coextancy and juxtaposition of opposites.⁴³

The bare outlines of the two folk-tales are enlivened by conflicting socio-economic ideals- free- lending and usury, social and civilized uses of wealth and its disruptive forces, inevitability of credit and the social unpopularity of the creditor, and the like. But this is not to mean that Shakespeare wanted to solve a set of preconceived problems in the play. It is only in the artistic process of harmonizing the plot and characters that the issues became alive to him. Though Antonio trades with the New World and is well-versed in business organization characteristic of the bourgeoisie (cf. I. i. 42-4), he is, temperamentally, an aristocrat and largely upholds, along with Bassanio and Portia, the medieval values. Against this thesis is opposed Shylock's acquisitive spirit, his defence of rising economic individualism of the New World (vide IV. i. 90-103). The play brings out the inherent contradictions and inadequacies of both the positions.

D. M. Cohen finds the play anti-Semitic⁴⁴, and M. C. Bradbrook and F. Kermode insist that the play's central opposition is one of Justice and Mercy (of the Old Law to the New)⁴⁵. As for anti-Semitism, is it not a fact that whatever sympathy we have for Shylock mainly rests on a recognition of his wounded religious feelings ? If Shakespeare's main theme were Justice and Mercy, as maintained by Bradbrook and Kermode, why did he present the Christians, except Portia and Bassanio, as sworn Jew-baiters ? Wilson suggests that Shakespeare could not come out with open support for the Jews in face of the strong wave of anti-Semitism of his day.⁴⁶ A declaration in support of a Jew's claim for the pound of flesh anthologized in *The Orator* (1596)⁴⁷ shows that Elizabethan England was not Nazi Germany. The 'gentle' Antonio treats Shylock brutally (I. iii. 125-6), Solanio makes a cruel, bawdy pun on Shylock's lament over his runaway daughter (III. i. 301), and Gratiano spares no occasion to revile the Jew in the filthiest terms. Thus the characters are made to expose their own bestiality. Whatever its raison detre, Shylock's impassioned speech (III. i. 45ff.) releases the agony of a persecuted minority. Wilson himself has marked close verbal resemblance between part of this passage and some of More's lines addressed to the pogrom-rioters in *Sir Thomas More*.⁴⁸ Is there, then, any need for explicit moralizing ?

Shylock ('cormorant' and 'wolf') is dangerous in his blind acquisitiveness ; the threat posed by money-power to cherished traditional values is too vivid to be missed. At the moment of his prophetic choice, Bassanio finds gold deceptive and evil;⁴⁹ the metaphor, 'crisped snaky golden locks' (III. ii. 92), is apposite. The Venetian social system is inhumane ; the Duke is more powerless than Solinus to save a victim from the jaws of revengeful merchants. Arragon laments the dislocation of social classes (II. ix. 39 ff.), and the precarious uncertainty of living on trade alone informs much of the play's imagery. In such a background ideals of friendship, generosity, mercy and order (in the microcosm and macrocosm alike) glimmer like 'sunlight on a broken column'.

But in *The Merchant*, as elsewhere, Shakespeare's choice is tempered with ambivalence. On the one hand, he is not all praise for the improvident aristocrats ; on the other, the new wealth and luxuries pouring in from the New World excite his imagination. Unlike a medievalist, he will make the best of both worlds and shows his zest for the material pleasures of life in warm, sensuous descriptions of precious silks, spices and majestic merchant-ships and in linking love with wealth, investment and profit. The picture of Lorenzo and Jessica squandering 'four-score ducats' in one night or exchanging the turquoise ring for a monkey, Antonio's equating poverty with death (IV i. 264 ff.) and the restoration of the rings by Portia and Nerissa suggest that prodigality, and even unbounded generosity divorced from prudence, are not always laudable.

This duality together with a profound understanding of the Jewish problem makes the play unconventionally provoking, laughter and sympathy make up its complex pattern. A victim of religious bigotry, Shylock also exposes the contradiction and hypocrisy of the Christian attitude towards commercial credit. The reference to slaves owned by the Christians (IV. i. 90 ff.) gains momentum if we care to recall how far slave-traffic contributed to colonization. While the Jews and the Gentiles bred metals as fast as they could, the choice of usury as the sole profession mainly by the former, provoked intense hostilities which, in turn, made them,

generally speaking, distrustful, wily and ferocious. W. H. Auden writes :

Usury, like prostitution, may corrupt the character, but those who borrow upon usury, like those who visit brothels, have their share of responsibility for this corruption and aggravate their guilt by showing contempt for those whose services they make use of.⁵⁰

But that does not exonerate Shylock from his guilt ; to understand the social roots of crime is not necessarily to forgive it. But if the condition of Shylock's conversion appears too hard, it is imposed, we should remember, not by Portia but by Antonio, and that, again, is an ironic indictment of his 'gentility'. Thus the play is ambivalent to the core, and our response to Shylock's punishment is meant to be complex. Instead of impairing artistic unity, the Shakespearian dialectic lends extra dimensions to the play which provokes hard thinking. It is essentially serio-comic.

And the wonder of it all is that Shakespeare combined this trenchant realism with the fantastic tale he dramatized. Rooted in popular imagination, the folk-tale takes us to the many-coloured world of our dreams where characters are sharply divided into sheep and goats and administration of justice follows a moral formula taken as absolute. Bassanio chooses the right casket, for Portia loves him ; Shylock or 'the ogre of money-power' (Murry's phrase) must be subdued ; Antonio's ships must return however late, and Belmont cannot be less than earthly paradise where music hardly ceases and the God-like heroine drops manna in the way of starved people. But even when Shakespeare accepted these tall claims of the exotic romance, contemporary realities shadowed him 'Hic et ubique'. He contrasted these with the actualities of 'a naughty world' and vexed their applications with equivocations and doubts. To come back to our early statement, aesthetic enjoyment has varied shades and each Shakespearian comedy should be judged by the effect it creates. It is only then that the play's implications go on expanding like rings in a pond.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. 'There appears in it such a deadly Spirit of Revenge, such a savage Fierceness and Fellness, and such a bloody designation of Cruelty and Mischief, as cannot agree either with the Stile or Characters of Comedy.' *Shakespeare Criticism*, ed. Smith, N., W. C., pp. 28-9

2. *Shakespearean Tragedy*, rpt. 1976, p. 14. Cf. nearly indentical views of Raleigh, *Shakespeare*, rpt. 1965, 150-1, and of Quiller-Couch. *The Merchant*, ed. with Wilson, (NCS), rpt. 1953, xxviii
3. Op. cit., 14
4. *Shakespearian Comedy*, rpt. 1955, 160
5. 'Shylock', 1927, anthologized in *Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Wilders, J. (simply Wilders hereafter), 47-57
6. Wilson, *Shakespeare's Happy Comedies*, 1962, 109
7. See, for instance, Leggatt, A., *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love*, 1973, 149
8. Charlton, op. cit., 208
9. 'Notes on Comedy', *Scrutiny* I, 1932-3, 356-367
10. Sewell, A., *Character and Society in Shakespeare*, 1951, 19
11. *Shakespeare*, 1936, 205-8
12. 'Elizabethans and Foreigners' in SS, XVII, 1964, 46-7
13. *Shakespeare's Imagery*—, rpt. 1958, 145
14. *Dev. of Sh's Imagery*, rpt. 1953, 82
15. Op. cit., 186
16. Op. cit., 82-3
17. *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, rpt. 1972, 171
18. For love-voyage cluster cf. *Faerie Queene*, Bk. I, Cant. iii, stanzas 31-2 and Donne's ingenious 'Love's Progress'. For commonplace connection of love with usury of the time see *Hero and Leander*, I, 232-6.
19. Cf. Wilders, 91
20. *Shakespeare and his Comedies*, 1962 edn., 65
21. Ibid., 64-8
22. Theme of love's voyage recurring in Shakespeare's works treated at length by Brown, op. cit., 45 ff.
23. Cf. Bullough, G., *Sources*, I, 463-76
24. Q who makes the accusation has been criticized by many. See Murry, op. cit., 204. The phrase is S. Burckhardt's 'The Merchant of Venice: The Gentle Bond', in *Shakespeare's Comedies*, ed. Lerner, L., (Lerner, hereafter), 161.
25. Q's phrase, op. cit., xxiv
26. *The Merchant* (NA), ed. Brown, lv
27. Clemen, op. cit., 84
28. Count of words taken from *Oxford Concordance to The Merchant*, compiled by Howard-Hill, T. H., 1969
29. Van Doren, Wilders, 96

30. J. W. Draper : 'Usury in *The Merchant of Venice*', *Modern Philology*, V. XXXIII, 1935-6, No. 1, 37-47. E. C. Pettet : 'The Merchant of Venice and the Problem of Usury', *Essays and Studies*, XXXI, 1945, anthologized by Wilders, 100-113.
31. In a passing reference to 'some useful parts of money-making' Aristotle brands usury as hateful and unnatural because it makes money out of money ('tokos' used by him means both 'offspring' and 'interest'). *Politics*, I. x.
32. Op. cit., 142
33. Op. cit., 38-9
34. Cf. Wilders, 109-11
35. Vide Stoll, Wilders, 54 ff. See also Palmer, *Political and Comic Characters of Sh*, 1962 edn., 427
36. Murry's phrase, op. cit., 195
37. Perhaps a supposition that a servant is incapable of such a poetic flight led one editor, Kittredge, G. L., to ascribe, unconventionally, these lines to Nerissa. See Barber who uses Kittredge, op. cit., 175.
38. See Wilders, 53-7
39. *Shakespearian Comedy*, rpt. 1977, 57-8.
40. Palmer, op. cit., 426. Barber, op. cit., 183
41. 'So Shylock returns from a gay abhorrent banquet to knock on his empty and emptied house'. So Q, op. cit., xx.
42. Danby, *Sh's Doctrine of Nature*, 1949, 50 ff.; Sewell, op. cit., 8 ff.; Jenkins, 'As You Like It' in SS, VIII, 1953: 'Opposite views may contradict one another, but of course they do not cancel out. Instead they add up to an all-embracing view far larger and more satisfying than any one of them in itself'. p. 45; Rossiter, 'Ambivalence: The Dialectic of the Histories' in *Angel with Horns*, 1961; Muir, 'Shakespeare and Politics' in *Shakespeare in a Changing World*, ed. Kettle, p. 81; Kettle, op. cit., 9
43. Op. cit., 62 ff.
44. In 'The Jew and Shylock', SQ, XXXI, 1980, No 1, p. 53
45. 'Moral theme and romantic story', 1951, Wilders, 133 ff. For Kermode's view see 'The Middle Comedies' in *Early Shakespeare*, ed. Brown and Harris, B., 220 ff.
46. *Happy Comedies*, 112
47. Bullough, op. cit., 483-5
48. *Happy Comedies*, 111 ff.
49. Shakespeare dwells frequently on the benevolent and malevolent uses of gold. For the latter aspect cf., among others, *Romeo*, I. i. 212 & V. i. 80 ff.; *Cymbeline*, II. iii. 67 ff. & III. vi. 53 ff. and *Timon*, IV. iii. 25 ff.
50. Lerner, 148

PROBLEMS OF LITERATURE TEACHING IN THE ENGLISH HONOURS COURSE : SOME OF THE PARAMETERS.

SHYAMASREE CHAKRABARTY

Introduction :

In spite of popular belief to the contrary, theoreticians as well as teachers of literature have agreed alike that while it is true that a work of art demands a primal mode of perception, to an extent this art of perception can be regarded as a competence and thus should be possible both to impart as well as acquire. Purves in the Conclusions and Implications in his study of *Literature Education of Ten Countries* (1973) stated his findings : "Response to literature is a learned behaviour ... it is modified by what the student reads and it is affected by his culture."

In the present context, the literature teacher's experience is that the learner at the entry level (for the English Honours Course) does not, in general, possess the equipment which goes to mark a mature reader of literature. Yet, the learner is expected to display all the skills of a mature reader from an early stage. The nature of the traditional examination questions does not make allowance for his relative inexperience and consequent immaturity. The Honours Course instead of being a skills-developing means has been transformed into a skills-testing one.

In discussing the problems of teaching literature in the present context, it is pertinent to focus on those which have been identified as being peculiar to the second-language situation.

There seems to be as yet no consensus on a conceptual framework within which to teach or assess interpretation in reading English as a second language. Most of the ideas and instructions for the teaching of this have been either borrowed or have been adopted from materials for native language-reading improvement.

H. L. B. Moody's contributions in this respect are very significant. In his *Literary Appreciation* (1968) after having discussed the nature and importance of literature, its values in education, he goes on to discuss literary appreciation in a second-language. He points out the difficulty areas, namely, cultural differences, the complexity of the English language, Connotation, Indirect Expression, Register and Cultural references. Moody points out that "The aims, the values, the techniques of literary appreciation sketched out here obviously originated in the country where English is the first language, and where every student will have had the English language in use for thousands of hours. Is it possible for the student who comes to English as his second (possibly even third or fourth) language to manage the same feats of understanding and judgement?"¹

Moody mentions the tradition of reading in the "Older" countries of Europe. Some of the developing countries of the tropics, without this tradition, find it difficult to promote reading habits among its public. This, however, is possibly not a very relevant factor in the Indian situation. Purves also mentions the cultural factor as a significant one.

The complexity of English, the connotations that are associated with words, indirect expressions used by its native users, as well as the use of particular registers, the cultural references which go to form the entire background of a particular literature, are the problems that face a literature teacher of English in our context.

Lack of suitable supplementary materials : Another difficulty is that teachers do not have suitable supplementary materials to facilitate the teaching of the given syllabus. Some teachers make their own choice, but this is neither systematic nor scientific. Some of the important problems in our context are :

- (a) the learner's failure to recognise deviant forms
- (b) the learner's lack of attention to details
- (c) the lack of exposure
- (d) the mother-tongue influence
- (e) lack of language fluency
- (f) unfamiliarity with the cultural background.

The learner should be able to choose a reading style to suit his own purpose : skimming, scanning or reading intensively. He should be able to recognise the type of text he is reading as well as the stylistic elements in it. As for example, he should be able to recognise an advertisement as such and account for the persuasive elements in it. He should also know how to evaluate the information given in the text. For this, a formal knowledge of the foreign language would not be sufficient. A greater exposure than that provided by the syllabus will be necessary. Supplementary texts, over and above the syllabus, might prove to be of immense help here. Since the second-language learner tends never to stray beyond the limits of the syllabus, additional reading materials, judiciously selected keeping their difficulty in mind, should be useful. The learners' motivation will increase only when it becomes obvious to them that their training has a very special purpose : being able to read a foreign language effectively and critically, which will ultimately help them in achieving better results in their examinations.

The lack of specific objectives as far as literature teaching is concerned : In a literature course it is practically impossible to decide specifically, describe unambiguously, or even measure with accuracy the behavioural changes that can be hoped to be brought about as a result of literature teaching. A pupil cannot be told everything that he ought to find in a literary work as that would effectively check any first-hand response that he might have. In an ideal situation, literature-teaching would consist simply in exposing the learner to levels of poetry, fiction and drama appropriate to his level of development. This, however, is not feasible in the Honours class where shortage of time is a constant problem. If the syllabus provided some specific objectives, these could act as guidelines to the literature teacher in class, who would not, then, be totally dependent on his own resources only. Objectives would serve to make both the methodology adopted and the evaluation system more precise. This would benefit the learner most, as he will, at least, be allowed to have a more precise notion of what he has to achieve.

In a satisfying model of literature teaching, the teacher would :

"(a) Make possible the *experience* of literature ;

- (b) Make available such *knowledge about* literature as was necessary to gain that experience ;
- (c) Invite 'products' that extended the pupil's own interpretation and critical judgement ;
- (d) Satisfy himself and his pupils that in any curriculum unit there was evidence of progress, mastery or illumination."*

Ray Thomas has divided literature teaching objectives into three general categories :

TABLE 1
(Thomas : p119)

	Instructional	Expressive	Experiential
Aims	To inform	To provide occasion for learning	To offer the opportunity to experience a literary artifact
Audience	the uninformed	the enquiring	the sensitive
Method	instruction	exploration	presentation
Terminus	literary "knowledge"	"product"	response
Teacher's Response	assessment	appraisal	acceptance

For Thomas, as the diagram indicates, the experiential objective operates at the lower level of response, and not of instruction or interpretation. The teacher beginning with the imparting of information — knowledge — finally surrenders his authority and accepts the learner as a mature reader of literature. This, according to Thomas, should be the aim or the objective of the literature course.

Some Pedagogical Recommendations for Effective Literature Teaching :

The teaching of literature in the University does not follow any particular methodology. As such, the following recommendations might prove to be useful when formulating a workable methodology in the same field.

The first step in the act of interpretation in the second language context, would be to ensure the understanding of the literal meaning. Therefore, vocabulary skills, including the ability to use context clues, and comprehension skills including the relating of details the main point and grasping the sequence of ideas presented, would come under this category. This is within the scope of the Instructional Objectives, where the aim is to inform through instruction and the goal is literary knowledge.

The general tendency of the average teacher of literature is to neglect close study of the text in favour of critical reading about it. However, since the material of literature is "words", the study of the use of word is essential in the case of literature. The teacher should be able to make the learner aware of all the ways that the meaning of a word may arise :

- (a) central core of significance, which the word always carries — the dictionary meaning ;
- (b) meaning is derived from word — placing in the sentence or utterance ;
- (c) our mental association with the word. Though language is the material of the literary work, yet the total effect of a literary work, say a poem, does not depend on its language alone. The method of making lists of words used by a writer can be adopted. The next step would be to sub-divide the list into :
 - (a) *Simple words*—of one syllable and
 - (b) *literary words*, further sub-divided into
 - (i) words not likely to be heard in ordinary conversation
 - (ii) archaic words
 - (iii) words used in odd, unexpected situations
 - (iv) colloquial words with the flavour of talk
 - (v) common words — common because they are used more often than the ones in (i) and (ii) and because they can be used in all levels of language.

These divisions are only possible when the students have the ability to realize the proper context for the words. Knowledge of syntax, sentence structure, metre and sound are essential.

Stylistics in the Classroom

The focus on language leads us to problems of the role of stylistics/linguistics in the classroom. This has been a point of dissension among critics and literature teachers for a long time.

Fowler recommends the teaching of linguistics to students of literature. Linguistics is a theory of how language works : how it is acquired, how it communicates meanings, what kind of structures it employs. Literary criticism is the account of the use of language in some particular text. Therefore the knowledge of linguistics should help the student in his literature-study. According to Fowler, there have always been "linguistics critics, if that means students of literature, who pay particular attention to the language dimension of literary texts.

"Textual exegesis, and efforts to conserve ancient and honoured forms of language, have traditionally nurtured a linguistic science in intimate contact with the value and meaning of texts"*. It is only in this century that linguistics and literary studies have lost their inter-dependence.

Fowler points out three areas of advantage :

- (I) Some knowledge of how language works is indispensable basic information for the student and critic of literature (An educational claim).
- (2) Certain areas of literary study demand close engagement with the mechanics of language (e.g., metrics) : linguistics provides specific information and analytic technique (A technical claim).
- (3) Linguistics is an advanced theoretical discipline which provides certain insights into the nature of literature and criticism.

According to Widdowson the literary use of English is a type of communication — the literary writer uses language to communicate aspects of reality which are not immediately apparent to

people. He provides the reader with a new way of looking at things. The literary artist is "instructed in inquiring into the nature of reality which in some sense is concealed by the picture we have of it : a picture which is projected by our language".⁴

A literary text is independent of a social context, and its meaning has to be self-contained. "What the writer has to say cannot of its nature be conveyed by conventional means and in consequence he has to devise his own fashion of communicating. This consists essentially in *reversing the normal principles* of language structure and use, combining what is normally distinct and making distinct what is normally combined. The result of this is that our conventional concept of reality, realised as it is through the language code and the standard use we make of it is disturbed. It is still recognisably the reality with which we are familiar, just as the language in literary discourse is recognisably that which we use in our everyday affairs, but turned as it were, inside out — a reality which is presented in a strange new perspective."⁵

For the learner in the second-language context Panicker has a special recommendation. He points out that since every language makes use of a limited number of linguistic devices, and the individual writer deviates to achieve his special effects, special attention to these would lead to better response on the learner's part.⁶

The use of comparative literature

The suggestion is that for the better teaching and understanding of English literature co-operation with the regional language teachers may be fruitful. For our conception of modern literary forms and critical norms we are heavily indebted to English literature. There are roughly three stages in the growth of literary-studies in the Indian Universities.

- (1) The programme was to judge a foreign literature with foreign critical tools. The student was expected to give his own response to and naturally he often failed to do so.
- (2) There was a tendency to judge Indian literature with foreign tools.
- (3) The third stage — that of judging foreign literature with Indian critical tools — is yet to be acquired.

Mehta feels that the recent crop of "response-literature" in some Indian languages is a proof that we are approximating the third stage.⁷ This line of enquiry, when extended, will naturally result in "response studies at the micro-level", when something like Bengali response to English or American literature will emerge. The two basic questions (1) whether there is anything "foreign" in the unifying force called literature, (2) what is meant specifically by "critical tools", remain. But that the mother tongue interference/influence/transfer is a pertinent factor in literary criticism cannot be overlooked.

In the absence of specific objectives, the aims and goals of the Calcutta University English Honours Course may be deduced as follows :

- (i) that the learner may gain an understanding of specific movements, genres, recurrent themes and styles in English literature, from Old English to the Modern period, in a historical sequence ;
- (ii) that the student may gain an appreciation of richness and variety of English Literature.

Granting its shortcomings, it should be kept in mind that while the present syllabus does little to help in any way to achieve the desired aims of literature course, it does not actively stand in the way of their realization either.

Suggested Methodology

Classroom Strategies

- (i) The lecture-tutorial method, widely used at present (perhaps, the only method in use) need not be discarded totally. It can be combined with—
 - (ii) the seminar-type of teaching.
 - (iii) Discussions among students have to be encouraged. Personal response should be demanded. If credit is given at least at the college level of assessment for learner participation, there may be greater efforts to do so.

- (iv) Sitting arrangement could be altered, and made more informal (e.g., sitting around a central table). This would allow the learner to relax. Such changes are feasible since the honours classes are usually small in number.

Close-reading of texts is essential, as the general tendency is towards reference work at the expense of the text itself.

Evaluation

- (i) Questions should be largely textual, and the learner made to reveal his intimate knowledge of the text or penalised for the lack of it.
- (ii) Explanations are to be asked only of those passages which reward such close examination.
- (iii) First hand response, or literary appreciation, can be measured to an extent by the setting of 'unseen' passages of prose, poetry, and drama and inviting the learner's comments which must be supported specifically by the text itself. A step towards this has already been taken in the 1980 Honours syllabus, where twenty marks have been allotted to this exercise in Papers II-VII.
- (iv) Within the class, testing must be continuous. The student will have to continue to be retested till the desired competence is attained.

Further Suggestions

- (i) Introduction of adequate supplementary materials by the teachers, since the syllabus makes no provision for this.
- (ii) Drama passages should be selected for the 'unseen' exercise in the two drama papers.
- (iii) The unseen exercise in each paper should receive greater weightage (40 to 50 per cent of total marks of the paper).

Reasons

- (i) The learners will realise that first-hand response is of more significance than the memorisation of critical opinions.
- (ii) Their personal acquaintance with a larger area of literature will be ensured.
- (iii) They will be able to "read" for themselves and this will lead to desired changes in the methodology already in use.

Introduction to the Sample Course

The following sections have been called "teaching units" in the absence of any other more suitable terminology. It may be pointed out that the status of these 'units' are not equivalent to that of chapters in a course book. No attempt has been made to go beyond the actual course. The suggested supplementary materials may be utilised to achieve the specifically literary skills, which can then be applied for the interpretation, analysis and evaluation of the actual texts. Thus, these 'units' can be used in correlation with the actual course.

A time limit should be set by the teacher himself, taking into consideration all the aspects of his particular situation. However, under normal circumstances twelve to sixteen weeks should be sufficient for the learning of the knowledge-recall section. After this, more and more "mature" skills may be included in units 3-6 and in the suggestions for further units.

The Rationale of this Course

A course, such as this one, should be "graded", — implying a progression, preferably a gentle progression—where each step has to be small enough for the learner to cope with. It was felt that a simple linear sequence of items, or group of items, would not be productive of the desired results. No part of the course is really independent of the other parts. Under the circumstances, "the spiral curriculum" approach would seem to be the most logical one. "A logical solution to this problem might seem to be a cyclic or spiral structure, which required the learner to return time and again

to some aspect of language structure, language process or domain of language use in order to discover how it relates or is integrated with some different part of the language "" Like language-learning, the study of literature also is an integrative process, where the skills and abilities required in the earlier stages have to be constantly applied and referred to, when progressing to later stages.

Chart Indicating the Progression of the Course

Knowledge as a Product	Intellectual Processes	
Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
1. Knowledge/recall of information received	→	→
2. Development of awareness of the 'sound' of the language	→	→
3. Understanding the use of figurative language	→	→
4. Detection of tone and mood of a literary piece	→	
5. The experience of the entire literary piece by application of the skills acquired at stages I and II		
6. Evaluation of the work.		

As can be seen from the above chart the first unit deals with the knowledge and recall level. Unit 2 deals with the ability to "hear" literature properly. Unit 3 teaches the recognition of figurative language in a poem, and its role in literature. In Unit 4 the

detection of tone and mood in a literary work is dealt with. Units 5 and 6 belong to the third stage. None of these units are necessarily a sequel to the preceding one. There may be other possible units dealing with various linguistic and stylistic features which have not been possible to incorporate within this sample course.

Some Suggested Teaching Units

Teaching Units

Unit I

Introduction : In our situation, it may be more practicable to begin with the expository method in the initial stages, and then proceed to discovery methods. It has to be kept in mind that the learner, fresh from his Higher Secondary Course, has had little or no systematic exposure to literature.

The purpose here is to give—

- (a) The background material, including information concerning period, literary genre, cultural attributes, individual, historical and associational characteristics.
- (b) English history in brief
- (c) Promote an acquaintance with the Bible, the Graeco-Roman myths and legends, etc.

Level : Knowledge.

Objective : the ability to receive and recall the given information.

- Method :* (1) largely the lecture-tutorial method at this level.
- (2) Acquainting the learner with European art and culture through (a) audio-visual aids if possible, (b) art books.

Unit II

Introduction : In this unit, an attempt will be made to acquaint the learner with the sound and rhythm of the language, to help him to develop an "inner ear". This is an area of linguistic experience which is often totally neglected when teaching literature. With the development of sensitivity to language, another aspect of active

response will be ensured. The learner, without the benefit of a "trained" ear, will find it impossible either to respond to literature, or give his critical appreciation of it.

Level : Perception (of sound)

Objective : the ability to respond to and produce the sound and rhythm of the language.

Method : (a) Reading aloud by the teacher : choosing of proper supplementary materials for the purpose.

- (b) Acquainting and familiarising the learner with the technical devices used by the writer in order to achieve his "sound effects" [viz. alliteration, use of vowel lengths, polysyllabic and monosyllabic words, various rhythmic patterns etc ...]
- (c) Reading sessions conducted by the learners.
- (d) The use of recorded material (if possible).
- (e) Acquainting the learners with photostat copies of original manuscripts of various authors, to discuss any changes they might have made and what effect these have on the sound scheme of the piece.

Exercises

- (1) " Beaded bubbles winking at the brim".
 - (a) Note the use of alliteration
 - (b) If 'blinking' was substituted for 'winking', which version would you prefer? Why? Why did Keats change 'clustered' to 'beaded'? Attempt further substitution.
 - (c) Examine the rhyme-scheme : the alternation of long and short vowels.
 - (d) Note the avoidance of certain consonants (harsh and gutteral ones). What impression does this create ?

Assignment : Read Shelley's '*Ode to the West Wind*' aloud and answer the following questions :

- (1) Can you "hear" (a) the speed, (b) the violence latent in the poem ? When does this impression change ?
- (2) Give an account of the way the poet feels about the West Wind. Can you point to any "sound devices" he has used to achieve his purpose ?
- (3) Would the poet's feelings be obvious if heard by some one who does not know English ? (e. g. his excitement, sadness etc.).
- (4) Read Tagore's "*Barshashesh*" (Year Ending) ; compare the effects of the two poems.

Further examples and exercises may be added to these, till the learner is judged proficient enough to proceed to "hear" English literature on his own, and analyse his own preferences.

Unit III

The Use of Figurative Language.

Introduction : In this unit an attempt will be made to lead the learner to examine the author's technique so as to enable him to respond to the literary work. When in contact with a literary work, the question would be, does the writer use his words in their literal sense or "metaphorically"—extending their connotation in a unique way ? Metaphorical words and phrases are usually included within the wider concept of "figurative language".

At this stage, it will be enough to be able to recognise three kinds of figurative language—(i) Simile, (ii) metaphor, and (iii) personification.

Level—Knowledge/perception

Objective—the ability to recognise a simile/metaphor/personification in context.

- (i) **Method :** A simile states that one thing is *like* another. You are familiar with the use of similes : "Good as gold", "light as air", "tough as leather" etc.

A simile then, brings two things together in comparison. Look at the following extracts and try to find as many comparisons as you can :

(a) Let us go then, you and I

When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table.

- (1) Why is the evening like an unconscious patient ?
- (2) What tells you that this is a contemporary situation ?

(b) Examine Shelley's "*To a Skylark*" and answer the following questions :

- (1) Why is the skylark like

- (i) a star in Heaven in broad daylight
- (ii) like a hidden poet
- (iii) like a high-born maiden

Can you discover any common characteristic which all these comparisons share ?

Assignment : Find similes for six of the objects around you in the class-room.

(ii) *Metaphor* : A metaphor implies or suggests that one thing *is* another. A metaphor brings together, makes a comparison between two things, which are normally not associated together. Again, metaphors are part of our everyday conversation *e.g.*, "Politicians are the scourge of the country", "You are a pest", "She is a gem".

Examine the following extract for implied comparisons :

"This time of the year thou mayest in me behold,
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
Upon those boughs which shake upon the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang."

Can you paraphrase this extract into ordinary language ? Will the effect be the same ?

Assignment : Examine Grey's Elegy and find the metaphors the poet has used in it.

- (iii) *Personification* : This is a metaphor attributing human characteristics to non-human things or to abstract qualities. It assumes the non-human object or quality to be human.

Examine the following lines for examples of personification.

- (a) Death stands above me, whispering low
I know not what into my ear
Of his strange language all I know
Is, there is not a world of fear
- (b) I saw old Autumn in the misty morn
stand shadowless like Silence, listening...

Assignment : Examine (1) Shelley's '*Ode to West Wind*' and Keats '*Ode to Autumn*' for all the uses of similes, metaphors and personifications in them.

- (2) Write a note on how the impact of highly figurative language differs from that of more ordinary language.
- (3) Does realistic writing make less use of figurative language ?

Unit IV

Detection of the 'Tone' of the Literary Piece

Introduction

Why is the comprehension of tone so important ?

Each literary work is made up of a list of words, longer or shorter, arranged in a particular way. This arrangement and also the choice of words may be looked at from the point of view of different concepts such as 'tone', 'style', 'register' etc. It must be remembered that these are not mutually excluding, separate or even separable components of a literary work, but all aspects of the same thing.

Level : Perception/interpretation

Objective : the ability to comprehend and respond to the tone of a literary work.

Method : Explain the concept of "tone" :

A few points to remember about tone :

- (1) When we talk about the "tone" of a passage, we actually refer to the 'tone' of its author.
- (2) Through 'tone' the writer is actually indicating the kind of response he wants his readers to have. For this purpose, he uses a series of cues and signals, which the reader has to detect.
- (3) 'Tone' is taken by analogy from "tone of voice" of everyday conversation, to which we have learnt to respond through experience.
- (4) "Tone" may be difficult to detect in literature for there will be no spoken inflexions, along with facial expressions and gestures to guide the reader.
- (5) To mistake an author's tone is to misinterpret his intention.
- (6) As in everyday conversation, so in literature, the accurate registration of tone can only be the product of extensive experience
- (7) There may be infinite variations of "tone", even within a single piece. This unit deals with three variations of tone, dealt with in three sections. Subsequent sections may be added to familiarise the learner with the varieties of "tone".

Section I

Look at the following passage and consider the person described, his personality, as it emerges from the textual clues, the words chosen to be used by the author.

"Meanwhile enters the expectant peer, Mr. Bult an esteemed party man who, rather neutral in private life, had strong opinions concerning the district of Niger, was much at home also in the Brazils, spoke with decision of affairs in the South Seas, was studious of his parliamentary and itinerant speeches, and had the general solidity and suffusive pinkness of a healthy Briton on the central table land of life".

Discuss this passage from George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. What is her attitude towards Mr. Bult? Can you pick out the particular words which help you to form your opinion?

Read Wole Soyinka's poem "Telephone Conversation" carefully and answer the following questions :

1. This is a poem dealing with a situation most of us are familiar with. Describe, in one sentence, the situation presented here.
2. The writer is a well-known contemporary poet from West Africa. Could a similar poem be written by an Englishman?
3. The colour theme is very significant in this poem. How many colours does the poem mention? Can you explain their significance?
4. There are two characters in the poem :
 - (a) The speaker
 - (b) the landlady.

What can you tell about their characters and the social levels from which they come? [Quote from the text].

5. In which sense is this poem a modern one?
6. Pay attention to the technique he uses : sibilant consonants polysyllabic and hyphenated words, repetitions, capital letters for some words, the colour scheme.
7. How do these factors link up to indicate the tone of the poem? Do the last two lines indicate a change of mood in the speaker?

Assignment : Read Browning's *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister* and answer the following questions :

- (1) What might be a one-sentence statement of the theme of the poem?
- (2) What do we reveal of ourselves when talking of others?
- (3) If you had to organise a stage presentation of this poem, how would you present the monk? What tone would you use? Are there any variations in the tone?

Section II

Introduction : Comprehension of the “voice” of the satirist is very important if the literary piece is to be interpreted correctly. Appreciating satire is important for these learners because the course includes Dryden (*Absalem and Architophel*) Pope (*Rape of the Lock*) and Byron (*Parts of Don Juan*).

- A. Read e. e. cummings’ ‘next to of course god america i’ and answer the following questions ;

- (1) Who is the speaker ?
 - (a) the poet himself as the upholder of patriotism ?
 - (b) a chauvinistic windbag of a politician ?
 - (c) a stolid citizen, fully conscious of his duty ?

Can you find any clues in the poem which would justify your choice ?

- (2) What is the situation in which he is speaking ?
- (3) Do you feel he really loves God more than his country ?
- (4) Why has the poet used so little punctuation in the poem ? What is implied by the lack of the final pause in line 14 ?
- (5) What is the significance of the last line ?
- (6) How many voices are speaking in this poem ? Can you hear the voice of the poet anywhere ?
- (7) The tone of the poem is
 - (a) patriotic ?
 - (b) satirical ?
 - (c) both ?

Is the same tone maintained all through the poem ?

- (8) Comment on the technique used

[lack of punctuation for most of the time, use of swear words]

- (9) If the final line be re-written as
“He spoke : And poured slowly a glass of water”
which version would you prefer ? Can you explain why ?

- B. Read "Very Indian poem in Indian English" by Nissim Ezekiel with special attention to the author's tone and style, and answer the following questions :
- (1) Why has the poem been included in the same section as e. e. cummings' poem ?
 - (2) What can you imagine about the speaker from his diction ?
 - (3) Can you identify the voice of the speaker with that of the poet's ?
4. The tone of this poem is a
- (a) moral one ?
 - (b) appreciative one ?
 - (c) satirical one ?

Quote from the text to support your answer.

5. Comment on the title. Does the poet's attitude come through here ? Which particular word would you consider to be responsible for this ?
6. Comment on a particular stylistic device used here by the poet (present continuous tense). Why does he do this ? Is he successful ?
7. Do you think the poet's diction is due to the fact that he himself is an Indian ?
8. Comment on the following
 - (a) "200 per cent correct"
 - (b) "lend me the ears"
 - (c) "total tea-totaler, completely total"
9. Are there any inconsistencies in what the speaker says ?
10. How does the poet make his own standpoint clear ?
11. Has the poet been successful in evoking picture of the Speaker before you ?
12. Write a paragraph describing the speaker, his personality. Use clues from the text. Does any one you know speak like this ? Make a list of any unusual words or expressions they might be using.



Section III

Thematic Similarity

Introduction: Another way of testing interpretations of tone would be by selecting materials of certain thematic similarity and then observing the variations of tone which each author is using to bring about the desired response in his reader. The clues are provided by the authors themselves by (a) their choice of words (b) the details they have chosen to emphasize.

level: Total experience of the tone of the literary work.

Method: Look at the two following poems. They have certain similarities as well as dissimilarities :

- (1) *Upon Westminster Bridge*—Wordsworth
- (2) *London*—Blake

Now try to answer the following questions :

1. How does Wordsworth present the city ? Are there any human characters in his poem ? (textual)
2. Wordsworth's London is a beautiful and noble spectacle. Which words are used to create this impression ? (textual)
3. Read LII and then complete the following statement..... "Wordsworth felt..." (textual / interpretation).
4. Do you expect Wordsworth to admire urban beauty ? (knowledge / recall)
5. Compared to Wordsworth, Blake's London is a.....place (interpretation)
6. Blake's London is full of people who are—
 - (a) happily engaged in their work ?
 - (b) victims of economic exploitation ?
 - (c) too noisy to be acceptable ?

Give reasons for your answer (interpretation).

7. Write a note on the particular techniques used by the two poets to achieve their purpose. (analysis)
8. Compare and contrast the tones used by the two poets. Can you read the poems in a similar way ? (analysis)

9. Which poem creates a more powerful impression on you ?
Why ? (evaluation)

Assignment : Compare Keats' '*Ode to Autumn*' with Hood's '*Ode Autumn*'. Pay attention to the figurative language used, sound scheme, and the tone of the poets, in the way they treat a common subject.

Unit V.

Introduction : In this unit an attempt will be made to enable the learner to proceed to experience an entire literary piece by the application of the skills he has acquired in Stages I and II.

Objective : The ability to experience a literary piece by the application of the skills previously acquired.

Method : (a) My last Duchess—Browning
(b) Ulysses —Tennyson

Read the two poems and answer the following questions :

- (1) What is the form used by the two poets ? What do you know of the tradition of this form ? (knowledge/recall)
- (2) Tennyson has used blank verse and Browning rhymed verse. Compare and contrast their uses with that by two other English poets, using the same literary techniques. (knowledge/recall/application).
- (3) Ulysses is driven by a sense of restlessness. Does this seem to be a blessing or curse ? (interpretation).
- (4) Consider the character of the speaker in Browning's poem. If you were choosing an actor for this role, what qualities of tone or voice would you look for ? Account for your choice. (analysis).
- (5) What are the precise implications of the following :
 - (a) One equal temper.....in will
 - (b) Notice Neptune,.....thought a rarity ?

Assignment : Compare and contrast Browning's '*The Laboratory*', '*The Last Ride Together*' and '*Porphyria's Lover*'.

1. Comment on Browning's use of the dramatic monologue. Does he do this successfully ? Give reasons for your answer.

2. Which are the common elements in these poems ?
3. What was Browning's purpose in writing these poems ?
4. Can you hear the various characters talking ? How is this made possible ?
5. How does Browning create the 'tone' of each particular poem ?

Unit VI

Introduction : This unit deals with the evaluation of a particular literary work. This ability marks a 'mature' reader.

Objective : The ability to evaluate a literary piece.

- A. Wordsworth : "A slumber did my spirit seal"
- B. Hartley Coleridge : "She passed away like morning dew"

Read the above two poems and answer the following questions :

- (1) Is it better to hear a poem or read it ? Can you give a reason for your answer ?
- (2) How do we better comprehend the tone of a poem, by hearing it or reading it ?
- (3) Note the use of verbs in A in L 1 and L 5. Do you think there is any special significance ?
- (4) What are the implications of the following in A ; 'seal', 'human fears', 'thing', 'diurnal course' ?
- (5) Do you get the impression that Wordsworth feels it is weak and sentimental to grieve over death ? Do you get the identical impression in B also ?
- (6) Does Wordsworth suggest that the girl has passed on to heaven and is better off there ? Is this impression created in H. Coleridge's poem ?
- (7) Do you feel that B has a deeper note of grief than A ? Which poem appeals to you more ? Why ?
- (8) Comment on the similarities and dissimilarities of the two poem.

Assignment

1. Read Hardy's *The Man in the Cemetery* and critically comment on
 - (a) the use of figurative language ;
 - (b) the use of rhyme and rhythm ;
 - (c) the tone/ mood of the poet ;
 - (d) other stylistic features of the language used.
2. Comment on the last two lines of the poem. Do they give you any idea of Hardy's attitude towards life ? Link up your answer with all the other works of Hardy that you have read.

C O N C L U S I O N

The sample course was designed to aid the teacher in the classroom. The principle behind this course, in brief, is to encourage the learner to look at the text with closer attention than has been the practice in the past. To this end, comparable supplementary material has been given, and specific objectives sought to be taught, the idea being that one set of materials is made available to the learner and he learns to look at comparable material in the same way, thus leading on to further skills, which will come as part of the larger curriculum.

It has been mentioned earlier that this is a sample course, by no means exhaustive. As the chart indicates, other skills pertaining to linguistic and stylistic devices may be introduced at stages I and II.

It is recognised that without systematic practical tryout, no generalisations about the application value of such a course can be drawn. Moreover, any one point of view must be supported by others before it can generally be accepted as feasible.

Finally, it must be clearly stated that there cannot be any one absolutely set method for a literature course. There must always be some allowance for the individual in the teacher as well as the learner. However, as has been mentioned earlier, instructional

objectives are useful for the teacher, while the expressive, especially the experiential objectives, operate not at the level of instruction, but of interpretation and finally, experience.

Some sort of a proof of this experience is necessary in the formal educational system. This will be provided by the "product" that the learner produces. It may be either written or verbal. The significance of this cannot be overestimated in spite of the fact that a well-wrought product, does not guarantee a personal experience with literature, though it may reveal that such an engagement has taken place, or bring the possibility of one a little nearer.

In subsequent units further objectives may be specified and taught. Relevant supplementary materials must be selected to give greater exposure to the learner and familiarise him with comparisons and contrasts which are not possible within the restrictions of the prescribed texts. The exercises set, however, should not only test the abilities specified in the particular unit, but also recall the ones acquired earlier.

Further suggestions : Units based on :

- (1) wider range of pieces based on thematic similarities,
- (2) rhetoric and prosody,
- (3) literary genres : how the special characteristics of the particular genre are being used in a unique manner within the piece etc.
- (4) stylistic / linguistic analysis of language,
- (5) similar work to be carried out in the areas of prose and drama.

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FESTE THE FOOL IN SHAKESPEARE'S *TWELFTH NIGHT*

SURABHI BANERJEE

"This mime of mortal life in which
We are apportioned roles we misinterpret....."

(Moral Epistles, Seneca).

As pastime and revelry constitute a kind of borderland between the everyday world and the stage-world, the title of *Twelfth Night* inevitably suggests the traditional feast of mirth in Christian countries, and the play is generally treated as a Saturnalian Comedy, the celebration of revelry. The three dominant images of love, eating and music—the main components of revelry celebrated in a mundane and temporary world of indulgence, characterized by a pervasive note of gaiety and jubilance. reinforce this idea.

Feste is the presiding spirit over the play, the master-mind and controller of *Twelfth Night*; as the very name is suggestive of the Italian 'Festa' or 'Festare', he is the ruler of revels, the master of the feast epitomizing the mood of holiday release. As the Fool was an indispensable presence at Renaissance revels and the Saturnalian pattern of Comedy also appeared in the theatrical institution of clowning, Feste is often treated as a character belonging to the category of grotesques or solitary excrescences whom Shakespeare created only to cater to the insistent demand of the "groundlings" for an "an ounce of mirth". As a natural corollary to this assumption, Feste is mainly considered as a typical clownish figure, who is revelry incarnate in a "festive" comedy, his role being peripheral to the plot of the play.

Although it is generally held that the character of Feste is not relevant to the play's structure, and that his character does not fit into the main pattern of the plot of the Comedy since he is not

directly involved into the dramatic action, I think, however, that even at the lowest level of participation *Twelfth Night* would be far less delightful and satisfying a comedy without Feste. For he brightens the comedy, makes it gayer with his songs and witty repartees and thus heightens the pervasive atmosphere of merry-making and entertainment. As Lear's fool intensifies the pathos of Lear's tragedy, so does Feste accentuate the gaiety of this characteristic Shakespearean happy comedy; he strikes the keynote of the comedy, presiding over the curative misrule in Olivia's household.

He is the most musical of Shakespeare's jesters, a gay minstrel-fool. Music is one of the chief components in the revelry of *Twelfth Night*; and no other Elizabethan fool gives such an atmosphere of music to a play as Feste gives to this play. The role of music is fundamental to the spirit of the play, as Hollander writes;¹ "Full of games, revels, tricks and disguises, it is an epiphany play, a ritualized *Twelfth Night* festivity itself".

Feste's songs, sung to Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, to the Duke, to Malvolio and finally, the epilogue—all function in the plot as well as with respect to the general theme of feasting and revelry. If *Twelfth Night* represents a high point in one phase of Shakespeare's musical dramaturgy, it is crystallized through Feste, the singer. Among the characters whom Malvolio refers as the "lighter people", it is "Feste the singer and prankster whose tabor and pipe serve as a travesty of Viola's vocal chords."² His fine raillery, diversified with songs, creates the festive mood of the comedy. He spices the entertainments with the savour of his witty sallies and his final song is a call to reality and at the same time the wittiest comment on the movement of the play.

Structurally, *Twelfth Night* is compounded of three plots; central to the play is the Puritan gull Malvolio. Feste's befooling of Malvolio, as Sir Topas, is the unmasking of a gull by his own wit, thus, Feste plays the main role in Malvolio's story of self-recognition. The second plot deals with the love of Olivia for Viola-Cesario, its happy resolution being the marriage of Olivia and Sebastian. The third plot is the story of Viola and Orsino; in these two plots, Feste serves mainly as a shrewd critic of the romantic lovers.

As "Foolery does walk about the Orb like the sun, it shines everywhere", he trips lightly from one level to another and serves as a link between various plots and throws into relief many of the important points of this romantic comedy. He bridges the gap between the romantic main plot and the farcical underplot; without him this romantic comedy might degenerate into insipid melodrama. He is the most ebullient in spirit yet the only level-headed and consistent character in the play, a detached, ironical observer of everything and everyone about him.

Feste's role as observer is similar to Viola's role as "actor" in her disguise as a page. He takes part not only in the major plot of Olivia's love-affairs but also in the gulling of Malvolio, by identifying himself with chaos and disorder in Olivia's household. In these various plots, Olivia fools Orsino by rejecting him and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew fool Malvolio. Sebastian is a fool of circumstances and the paradox is that Feste, being a professional fool, is less of a fool than any of the rest in the play.

If *Twelfth Night* is a genial satire on the self-love of Malvolio and Sir Andrew in contrast to the refined passion of Orsino-Viola and Sebastian-Olivia, then Feste's role in the play cannot be underestimated. The final Act of the play consists of "discovery", "anagnorisis" or unmasking of true identities, at the end of which Feste the "pure fact of feasting" remains alone on the stage and his final song is a summation of the play.

If the play is considered as "say, a little sad and certainly high-fantastical"³. Feste positively plays an integral part by enhancing its gaiety, introducing its sadness by reminding us time and again that "Youth's a stuff will not endure" and by performing a corrective function in the fantasy world of comedy.

The highest level of Feste's role in the play, I think, lies in his refinement of the festive spirit of comedy which purifies rather than refutes the Humours-Comedy of Jonson. For if, as it has been alleged, the main purpose of the play is to refute the moral validity of the Comedy of Humours⁴, even then Feste serves as a major force by symbolising revelry itself, being so much more an tha simple representative of wisdom in folly or the voice

of cool reason in a characteristic romantic comedy. Thus Feste not only contributes to the jocund atmosphere of the comedy by creating the mood for his jaunty remarks and 'songs of good life', but he serves as a guide through the mazes of Illyria and thereby corrects the Illyrian excesses. Instead of being an excrescence on the plot, he is organically related to it. He did not excel, however, the playwright's original intention like Falstaff or Lear's fool.

Secondly, by ridiculing the excess of sentiments and the folly of romantic love, he lends to the audience a bi-focal vision or rather a double-consciousness, helping to distance the play which in course of the action, mainly through his suggestions, transcends the genre of a Saturnalian comedy. For one tends to raise the question as the curtain falls—is it all pure revelry? or, aren't the dominant images rather surfeit and sickening? Isn't it a comedy, as refined and extended by Feste, corrective, in mocking excess of any kind?

Finally, in creating Feste Shakespeare fused the professional comic role of a festive celebrant with that of a choric mediator who is not only central to the play but vital to the general idea of Shakespearean comedy, through his evocation of the motif of illusion and reality. He is the only Fool to whom Shakespeare attributes an epilogue rounding off the play, without which the work would have been nothing more than an expression of the saturnalian spirit in Comedy or a Shakespearean version of Humours - Comedy.

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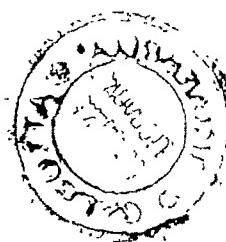
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P. C. Ghosh's biographical sketch has been published in this issue.

AN OBITUARY



Born in Calcutta in 1915 in a highly educated and respectable family, Prof. Probodh Chandra Ghosh had his education in Mitra Institution, Scottish Church College and the University of Calcutta. In his student days he edited the journal 'Sriharsa'. He worked for a few years as Lecturer in English in City College, Calcutta. He was the Secretary of the City College Teachers' Association. He was a member of the Governing body of City College. He was the Secretary of the All-India Educational Conference in 1953. He was also a member of the Governing body of Indian Art College, Calcutta.

As Lecturer in the Department of English in the University of Calcutta he organised Youth Festivals. He also acted for some years as Secretary, University Colleges of Arts and Commerce.

Later he was appointed Reader in English. He was for some time Head of the Department of English and demonstrated his ability as a competent administrator. The University of Calcutta appointed him Vidyasagar Lecturer in Bengali and the subject of his lecture was 'রবীন্দ্রনাথের ভাষা ও সাহিত্য'. The lectures were published in a book form in 1973. His other publications are :

1. এক বছরের প্রধানতা
2. এখানে মৃত্যুর হাওয়া
3. ইতিহাসের অভিযান
4. বাঙালী
5. আজো তারা ডাকে
6. রবীন্দ্রনাথের ভাষা ও সাহিত্য
7. Medusa
8. Poetry and Religion as Drama
9. Shakespeare's Mingled Drama.

Prof. Ghosh was an eminent man of letters and his death was deeply mourned by his numerous students, friends and colleagues.

Prof. Ghosh had contributed several articles to this journal, one of which is being reprinted in this issue.

THE INTERPLAY OF FORTUNE AND FREEDOM : A SHAKESPEAREAN THEME

ARUN K. DASGUPTA

The purpose of this article is to examine how some ideas and images derived from a common stock have been used in three plays, *Titus Andronicus*, *Timon of Athens* and *King Lear*. As works of art, both *Titus* and *Timon* rank far below *King Lear*, but *Timon* has received close attention from readers of *King Lear*. Affinity of ideas is not always a reliable basis of value judgement. It is often discovered by a process of abstraction hardly relevant to aesthetic experience. Nevertheless, some analogous ideas and associated images used in these plays may reflect a process of inner development, the shaping of a tragic idea in Shakespeare's mind.

Thematically, all these plays show the tragic consequences of extravagant generosity. The hero in each play feels free to commit this folly. Not only does all counsel go unheeded, but is also unnaturally punished both in *Titus* and *Lear*. Subsequently, the ingratitude and cruelty of those on whom his gifts have been lavished unhinge the mind of each protagonist. The horror on discovering the consequences of having given all is expressed in each play with a subtle change in method, and with a different purpose, clearly suggesting a direction in Shakespeare's development as a dramatist. We may not account for this change simply by dismissing *Titus* as a revenge tragedy of the Senecan type. In the later plays, Shakespeare seems to depend less on deeds than on words. There is no bloodshed in *Timon* : all the violence is merely vituperative. There is indeed much violence in *Lear*, but the edifice of the tragedy is erected not so much on deeds of horror as on the horror of Lear's exposure to the hardness of those daughters' hearts : first Goneril's, then Regan's, then of both together. They can do what they like with him by speaking : first, with calculated indulgence and later, with calculated cruelty. Even Cordelia, though obviously for

a different reason, does not have to *do* anything, but say one little word, "Nothing", to turn her father's heart against herself. This kind of emphasis on speech is altogether different from that obsession with the rhetoric of violence we find in *Titus*.

Shakespeare's ultimate concern in these plays especially *Timon* and *King Lear*, is with the problem of human freedom. The hero is compelled to ask himself how far he had been free to act in the manner he did and, at the same time, to try, perhaps with 'heroic futility', to free himself from the chains forged by his own thoughtless action. A common theme, the instability of fortune, provides the frame for this urgent question. The irony is that the hero feels bound to act like this at the start. Lear relies on the filial bond; Timon is eloquent on the theme of universal brotherhood (I. 2. 87 ff). The discovery of the baseness of human nature and of deceitful fortune exacerbates the contradictions, straining them to an intolerable pitch that is truly tragic. The nobility of the hero's mind struggles against the pain that such knowledge brings, and is all but unmade in its quest for true freedom as distinct from the false sense of power and possession arising from Fortune's favour.

The images we have chosen are mostly conventional. Take, for example, the 'high and pleasant hill' on which the Poet in *Timon* has 'feigned Fortune to be throned'. At the beginning of Act II. sc. i in *Titus Andronicus* Aaron describes Tamora climbing 'Olympus' top,/ Safe out of fortune's shot'¹. In *Lear* IV, vi, 1-80 there is, I suggest, a shadow of 'that same hill'. It is painted, of course, in a different manner. The shadowy allegory of the fall of eminence in *Timon* (I. i. 64-88) is submerged in the eerie sensation of dizzy eminence evoked by Edgar's verbal and vocal wizardry.² By putting out Gloucester's eyes a second time, so to speak, the scene forms a kind of analogue in miniature of the massive assault on Lear's five wits in the storm scenes. The fusion of contrived horror and masked trifling through which the fantasy is dissolved, is typical of the mingled mode of *King Lear*, and represents an advance on the abstract allegory of the *Timon* passage, as also on the uncomplicated rhetorical splendour of the passage in *Titus* (II. i 1-11). It concentrates imaginatively a theme of dual disenchantment, one acting therapeutically on the other—disenchantment with life followed by disenchantment with death. It forces upon Gloucester not only the less

meaningful contrast between his former state and his fall, but also the more meaningful one between the temptation of suicide and the acceptance with 'free and patient thoughts' (*Lr.* IV. vi. 80) of the futility of escape.⁸

The cliff is all the more effective because of the raging sea below : a cognate image of the instability of fortune. When combined, the two may effectively present a dilemma like that of Titus who exclaims on discovering Lavinia's defloration : "For now I stand as one upon a rock/ Environ'd with a wilderness of sea,/ Who marks the waxing tide grow wave by wave." (*TA* III. i. 93).⁴ What the image of the sea adds to the hardness of fate suggested by the rock is its power of inflicting misery in rapid succession ('wave by wave').

The hill, the sea and the wilderness were all stock descriptive images of a world in which Fortune is all powerful.⁵ Elsewhere the two images of the rock and the sea brought together can lend an unexpected vigour and keenness to the conventional theme of deceitful Fortune as expressed in this passage :

Vit. My soul, like to a ship in a black storm,
Is driven I know not whither.

Fls. Then cast anchor.
Prosperity doth bewitch men seeming clear,
But seas do laugh, shew white, when
Rocks are near.

(Webster : *The White Devil*, V. vi. 248-51, Italics mine)

The sea itself is a dominant image in *Timon*. Governed by the moon, the sea is 'the very centre and head of all astral influence.'⁶ The image of a tide is first used by the Poet in I.i.45 to describe the 'confluence of visitors' in Timon's hall. He uses the metaphor of 'a sea of wax', when speaking half-apologetically about his 'free drift' of meaning. The link between this 'sea of wax' here and 'the waxing tide', in the *Titus* passage (III.i.95) is probably more than verbal. The eagle in flight conveys an idea of freedom in sharp contrast with the sense of imprisonment in the *Titus* passage. Behind both 'eagle' and 'wax', however, there may be the subconscious memory of a myth, the legend of Icarus. If this is the association that explains the emergence of 'a sea of wax', it could well have been

strengthened by the familiarity of that legend as an illustration, often in a Christian context, of the theme of fall from a great height through aspiring folly. It is so used, for instance, in the opening Chorus of *Dr Faustus*, ll. 20-22.⁸ It is just possible that all these were present in Shakespeare's thought: the sun, the melting wax and, of course, the cementing idea of the fall as the consequence of the attempt to seek soaring freedom.

The analogue of 'the high and pleasant hill' reveals what the Poet's images conceal. The image of the sea recurs at several points in course of the play and is closely associated with various stages of its development. On the other hand, the image of free, unhampered flight conceals a crucial question which the opening scene begins to shape.

The occurrence of the word 'free' with a subtle gradation of senses in various passages has been noted.⁹ When it first appears (1.48), we observe, with some interest, the way the image of unimpeded flight ('But flies an eagle flight'), a variation on the earlier 'My free drift ... moves itself / In a wide sea of wax', is followed in course of a few lines by an image of ascent, ll. 66-80, presenting a shape sharply defined, a pyramidal structure ideally suited to the demonstration of the rise and fall, the vivid contrast between felicity and misery which constitutes tragic action.¹⁰ Thus what the poet, referring to his art, glibly assumes is implicitly questioned by a shape that shadows forth the hero's tragedy.

The Poet portrays Fortune enthroned on a high and pleasant hill and the Painter is quick to pick out 'this throne, this fortune, and this hill' that

With one man beckoned from the rest below,
Bowing his head against the steepy mount
To climb his happiness, would be well expressed
In our condition. (I. 1. 76-80)

With its long upward slope, evenly balanced by the steep decline, the figure lucidly demonstrates the irony of the ascent, of the treacherous instability of eminence. The climb ends and the descent begins at the apex. Precisely at the moment that her favourite 'wafted by her ivory hand' reaches the peak, Fortune has him in her grip. It is

merely a question of time¹¹ before he topples down to the edification of ‘mean eyes’ at the base “safe out of Fortune’s shot”. Note also the golden chain that goes all the way up. From this hang

.....all his dependants,
Which laboured after him to the mountain’s top
Even on their knees and hands. (I. 1. 88-90)

But

When Fortune in her shift and change of mood
Spurns down her late beloved, (I. i. 87-88)

they

let him slip down
Not one accompanying his declining foot (I. i. 90-91)

And so the Fool counsels well in *Lr.* II.iv. 72-4 :

Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck following ; but the great one that goes upward, let him draw thee after.

There is thus unconscious irony in Timon’s words :

‘Tis not enough to help the feeble up,
But to support him after. (I. i. 109-10).

We may glance, in passing, at the metaphor of ‘the tide’ used in *‘Antony and Cleopatra’* in a passage dealing with a similar theme :

And the ebb’d man, ne’er loved till ne’er worth love
Comes dear’d by being lacked. This common body,
Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream,
Goes to and back, lackeying the varying tide,
To rot itself with motion. (I. iv. 43-7).

The Painter’s words, concluding the allegorical discourse on the ways of Fortune with the great, serve as the cue for Timon. We see him moving about like the figure of Munificence in some allegorical Hall of Bounty.¹² We soon discover how brittle its splendour is.

The opening scene, as Maxwell points out, is crucial to an understanding of the play. It mirrors the central meaning of the play by

linking allegory with episode. Two episodes follow Timon's entry in rapid succession. In both we may find an extension of the theme of the preceding discourse. No time is lost in linking up the apologue with the story of Timon himself. The latter begins to unfold at this point. Himself a prisoner of Chance, Timon asks the Messenger from Ventidius : "Imprisoned is he, say you ?" (I.i.97) The brief episode concludes with the paradoxical juxtaposition pointed out by Maxwell.¹³

Timon : I'll pay the debt and *free* him.

Messenger : Your lordship ever *binds* him. (I. i. 106-7)

We may say Shakespeare uses the word 'free' like a magic net. Everytime he casts it into the stream, it comes up with a rich haul. In the opening scene there are hints and glimpses which, when pieced together, reveal how the meaning of the play is folded up within abstract discourse as well as episode. The mode of exploration, of discovering "a side-face" of Truth¹⁴, may be seen in the episode following the entry of the Old Athenian who seems to embody the degenerate soul of Athens, that cold, mercenary world which lies in predatory antagonism, cunningly concealed, to Timon's Hall and threatens the stability of "his continuant goodness". For this episode we may choose an allegorical caption : "The Brazen Tower and the Shower of Gold". It is necessary to grasp the ironic significance of the chain of gold to find the thread that binds this with the previous episode of Ventidius. Timon, we perceive, has erroneously forged a chain of gold to secure love and amity among men. Unconscious irony persists in Timon's later discourse on the nature of True Friendship (I.2.84-103).¹⁵ He succeeds, we see, on'y in binding himself fast in Prometheus pain and isolation, losing for ever that freedom which is the inseparable concomitant of perfect love which is also perfect goodness.¹⁶ He is self-imprisoned. His 'continuant goodness' lacks that power to 'bind' which is the soul of love. As Boethius says, poetically embodying the ancient idea,¹⁷ which is at the heart of Empedocles' doctrine of the four elements ("Kept in motion and change as they were alternately combined by love and separated by strife") :

That the universe with unchanging fidelity varies its harmonious seasons,

that seeds of things discordant mutually keep an abiding covenant, that Phoebus on his golden car brings in the rosy day, that Phoebe is queen of the nights which Hesperus ushers in, that the greedy sea compels its waves to keep fixed limits, lest they should take the liberty of ever shifting the far extended boundaries of the land—*the binder of all this order of things, who rules the earth and sea, and holds sway in the very heavens, is love*¹⁸

The tragic error of Timon lies in his all too willing choice of gold as the symbol wherewith to express his notion of love.¹⁹ Ironically, his words and actions echo the doctrine of love expounded by St Augustine : “.....love always confers independence on its object. It imposes nothing. It demands no return. It goes on giving even if it cannot excite love in answer. It is the one force in the world which does not bargain, which leaves the recipient completely free to reject, accept or repay”.²⁰

Timon, by implication, assumes the attributes of God as Love. But “Love not only endows the recipient with freedom, it also confers freedom on the giver. Love and freedom are thought of as existing together from all eternity in the nature of God”.²¹ Timon lacks this freedom, and does not know it. The chain of gold binds him as well. The logical counterpart of his erroneous choice of gold as the symbol of love is the choice of gold as the symbol ‘wherewith to express his hate’.²² Digging for a root, after the approved cynic manner of answering ‘mere nature’, he digs up gold.

The symbolic connexion of gold with the kind of prison Timon finds himself in eventually, can be perceived in the earlier episode of the Old Athenian and Lucilius. The well-known myth of Jove’s love for a mortal, Danae, could have cast its archaic shadow on the constituents of this episode, if Shakespeare had been exploring the possibilities of a mythical extension of his theme without robbing it of its contemporaneity.²³ Danae was confined by her father in a brazen tower, but Zeus visited her in a shower of gold. Allegorically speaking, the Old Man, too, seems to have shut up his daughter in some brazen tower. Timon’s hall of miracles is momentarily darkened, but the father’s obduracy can apparently be dissolved in a shower of gold.

Timon : This gentleman of mine hath served me long ;
 To build his fortune I will strain a little,
 For 'tis a bond in men.²⁴ Give him thy daughter :
 What you bestow, in him I'll counterpoise,
 And make him weigh with her.

Athenian : Pawn me to this your honour, she is his.

It may not be irrelevant to point out in this connexion the dual implication of the metaphor 'rain' in 1.85 ('Rain sacrificial whisperings in his ear'). The god-like stature of Timon implied here is not inconsistent with his assumption of powers in excess of his human status. But we may also recall his gross habit of 'raining' gold in indiscriminate profusion on all below ('This beneath world', 1.47) presumably to secure their love.

The concluding speeches of the two Lords have some relevance, too :

- 1 *Lord*. Come, shall we in,
 And taste Lord Timon's bounty ? *he outgoes*
The very heart of kindness.
- 2 *Lord*. *He pours it out* : Plutus, the god of gold,
 Is but his steward ; no meed, but he repays
 Sevenfold above itself ; no gift to him
 But breeds the giver a return exceeding
 All use of quittance.²⁵ (I. i. 276-283 : Italics mine).

The 1st Lord's speech, perhaps unintentionally, describes Apemantus and Timon in identical terms, if 'kindness' in 1.279 is read as an equivoke. As Apemantus goes out, the 1st Lord remarks : "He's opposite to humanity". He then goes on to say of Timon : "he outgoes/The very heart of kindness" (i.e. humanity, his own kind). To see what this really means we have to put beside this Apemantus' own comment later in IV. 3.300-1 : "The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends." "Mean eyes" in I. 1.97 probably expresses the same idea as "the middle of humanity" in Apemantus' speech. The foot and the head traditionally represent the extremes of the body politic or social organism.²⁶ Extending the analogy we may say that "middle" stands for "the heart". Details of human anatomy have been thrown into deliberate confusion in I.i. 90-97 : knees, hands, foot, head and eyes. This is quite in keeping with Shakespeare's late manner : 'the knee' (1.64) seems to have

set in motion a process of thinking in terms of images. The grotesque confusion in 1.97 may, however, be antithetically related to the terms in which a medieval moralist would express his picture of social well-being :

"The Church is divided in these three parts, preachers, and defenders, and . . . labourers. . . As she is our mother, so she is a body, and *health of this body stands in this, that one part of her answer another*, after the same measure that Jesus Christ has ordained it. . . , *Kindly man's hand helps his head, and his eye helps his foot, and his food his body*... and thus should it be in parts of the Church."¹⁷

The two episodes of Ventidius and the Old Man are related to the apologue of the high hill in such a manner as to suggest that the link between gold and goodness is a mortal one.¹⁸ Hence Timon's failure to be truly tragic. In *King Lear*, by contrast, the quest is for immortal goodness : the goodness of Cordelia in her stern espousal of truth, as also of Edgar and Kent, and above all, the goodness which is born of torment in Lear's soul. The ascetic temper of those who are violently embittered by life is informed by an abstract passion for freedom. For all his suffering Lear has a rewarding glimpse, albeit passing, of truth, but in Timon's hovel there is only torment and partial truth—the deformed truth begotten by despair upon misanthropy.

II

The elements and the cosmic luminaries provided Shakespeare and his age with endless resources of image-making. A recurrent image in *Timon* is that of the sun, probably because of its universal and apparently inexhaustible munificence. For Timon in his espousal of the world as his friend, this would be an obvious choice. Another function of the image is to figure forth the central contrast between the two states, of ascent and descent, as adumbrated in the apologue. 'Men shut their doors against a setting sun' is the gnomic observation of Apemantus (I.2. 145).¹⁹ To perceive, however, how ineffectual Timon's love is, we have to recall how the sun's light figured in medieval thought. Both Dante and Aquinas made use of this simile to illustrate the operation of the active intellect in different individuals.²⁰ The sun's light, it is pointed out, is common to all, but falling upon

different bodies creates various hues according to their different colour-receptivity. Timon, too, shines upon all alike, but his love is deficient in the creative activity of the discriminating intellect. He appears to be impelled by a motion which may, at best, be accepted as a debased version of the Platonic Eros diluted in sentiment.⁸¹ Alike in his espousal of the world and in his renunciation thereof, Timon remains unaware of individuals. Consequently, we look in vain for such an understanding of the ascent of the life of the spirit as is expressed in the sublime words of Piccarda : "Paradise is everywhere though the grace of the highest good is not shed everywhere in the same degree." (*Il Paradiso* III, 88-90). Neither his love, nor his hate admits of degree. Instead of the vision of the ladder of perfection ("hierarchy of bliss") we have here a vision of ascent in sublunary terms, the figure of the hill discussed earlier.

It is interesting to observe how the image of the sun, with which Timon in his glory is readily identified, comes back, when he suffers eclipse, to be correspondingly devalued, even maligned. At first, of course, it recedes, throwing into relief 'its spectral sister', the moon. Alcibiades asks : 'How came the noble Timon to this change ?' (IV.3.66). Timon replies : "As the moon does, by waning light to give./But then renew I could not like the moon ;/There were no suns to borrow of." This recalls the earlier remark of Lucius' servant : "You must consider that a prodigal course/Is like the sun's, but not, like his, recoverable." (III. iv. 12-13).

In his diatribes against the world and humanity Timon displays an ascetic strain reminiscent of the early middle ages which saw "nothing in economic life but the struggle of wolves over carrion", a uniform habit, among men of business, of living by cheating and profiteering.⁸² There is, accordingly, a massive transmutation of image-value in this phase. Timon now ransacks the universe for examples of thievery :

*The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction
Robs the vast sea ; the moon's an arrant thief,
And her pale fire she snatches from the sun ;
The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
The moon into salt tears ; the earth's a thief
That feeds and breeds by a composture stol'n
From general excrement— each thing's a thief.* (IV. iii, 438-444)

Placed beside the passage from Boethius quoted earlier,⁸³ this reveals the extent of Timon's alienation from the spirit of Eros which "is the source of all motion" that "sets things going as a loved object sets in motion him who loves it by its *attraction* and the desire it inspires."⁸⁴ Love comes to mean only lechery to him. His speeches abound in images of putrescence and concupiscence, one immediately suggesting the other. He invokes 'the blessed breeding sun'⁸⁵ in this way :

.... draw from the earth
Rotten humidity ; below thy sister's orb
Infect the air. (IV. iii. 1-3).

Or, again : "Thou sun, that comforts, burn!" (V. i 130)

III

The sea, too, has a parallel story as an image, as the action unfolds in *Timon*. At first it aptly mirrors Timon's boundless generosity, 'his continuant goodness', and later, the ebb and flow, the contrast between his 'houseless poverty' and his former splendour. Again, Timon's tide of hatred replaces the tide of love that, like the sea, sought no return.⁸⁶ It appears, too, as a thief in Timon's catalogue of cosmic thievery : "The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves/The moon into salt tears "⁸⁷ There is, however, a touch of pathos about this image that almost promises healing. Timon begins to recognise this, when he sees Flavious weep : "What, dost thou weep? come nearer; *then I love thee.*" (IV. iii. 485. Italics mine).

Torn between lingering doubt and vague stirrings of a new, almost alien, cognition, Timon eagerly scans his face :

Let me behold thy face. Surely this man
Was born of woman.⁸⁸

Though denied discriminate knowledge of individuals, who may be exceptions to his generalizations, benevolent or malevolent, Timon is redeemed, albeit for a moment, by a gesture of humility. He probably goes down on his knees⁸⁹ - 1.497 is short—and says :

Forgive my *general and exceptless rashness*,
You perpetual-sober gods ! I do proclaim
One honest man (IV. iii. 498-500. Italics mine)

His soul, however, is too full of that spirit of contradiction which is the dower of hate.⁴⁰ To efface all trace of bounty from his nature, he is unwilling to believe in this miracle. Stubborn in his misanthropy he hastens to add :

.....mistake me not, but one ;
No more, I pray — and he's a steward.

Nevertheless, it does denote a change, though Shakespeare does not develop it in the same direction as in *King Lear*. The change is conspicuous in the next scene (V.i. 185-7). The weary Timon is ready for death, but he begins to mend :

“My long sickness/Of health and living now begins to mend,/ And nothing brings me all things.”⁴¹ Here, clearly, is another kind of wealth. The noble nature that caught a ‘wrench’ and cried out in agony : “Cut my heart in sums” (III.iv. 93), and “Tell out my blood”, has learnt a new language of sums. Behind this is the first, faint glimmering notion of truth as it broke out in the tears of Flavius, ‘one honest man’. And so, not the inconstant moon, but the constant sea itself dissolves into tears as Timon begins his last speech :

Come not to me again, but say to Athens,
Timon hath made his everlasting mansion
Upon the beachéd verge of the salt flood,
Who once a day with his embosséd froth
The turbulent surge shall cover.⁴² (V. i 213-17)

In his ‘houseless poverty’ Timon expresses his choice of mansion and, perhaps, of raiment in these terms, seeking through annihilation a cosmic symbol answering the magnitude of his own grief. As Alcibiades says : “ ... rich conceit/Taught thee to make vast Neptune weep for aye/On thy low grave, on faults forgiven.” Thus the sea becomes at the end, as at the beginning, a fit symbol of Timon’s bounty, nobly opposed to “niggard nature.” It is very much of a presence in the play. It is not just a decorative background, but an organic metaphor to suggest, illustrate, amplify, as well as condense, the conflicting aspects of the theme of the play.

IV

If we compare the ‘salt flood’ in Timon’s last speech with that which weeps on every possible and impossible occasion in *Titus Andronicus*, we can measure the progress achieved in Timon. In the very ecstasy of grief⁴³ Titus comes to identify himself with the sea : “And wilt thou have a reason for this coil ? / I am the sea etc.” (III.i. 225 ff.). Later in IV. iii. 43-5, he says.” “I’ll dive into the burning lake below,/And pull her out of Acheron by the heels.” This calls back to our mind the image of the pit in II. 3, the horror of that ‘subtle hole’ where it all started, “Whose mouth is covered with rude-growing briars,/Upon whose leaves are drops of new-shed blood.” (II. iii. 198-200). The image of the pit with its mouth stopped — fit image of burning hell — seems to linger in II. iv. 36-7 :

Sorrow concealed, like an oven stopp’d,
Doth burn the heart to cinders where it is.

Tears vainly contend against fire : in fact they augment it. Hence, probably, ‘the burning lake’ in IV. 3.44. We may contrast with all this rhetorical vehemence and exuberance of fancy the fine elegiae turn the image of the sea gives to Timon’s melancholy meditations about the approaching end of his life.

Tears dominate the imagery of Titus’ speech from the beginning of II. ii, as he sheds tears in vain on dust to wring pity from the hardened hearts of Roman senators.⁴⁴ As the judges pass by, Titus, lying down, says :

Let my tears stanch the earth’s dry appetite ;
My sons’ sweet blood will make it shame and blush. (III. i. 14-15)

Tears so related to earth recall the figure used by Marcus towards the end of Act II :

One hour’s storm will drown the fragrant meads ;⁴⁵
What will whole months of tears thy father’s eyes ? (II. iv. 54-5)

‘Fragrant meads’ just hints at a flower-motif, probably suggested by ‘deflowered’ in 1.26 (‘But sure some Tereus hath deflowered thee’).⁴⁶ There may be beneath all this a kind of subterraneous

link with the forest in which Chiron and Demetrius had hunted a doe : the same forest, in a manner of speaking, as in Ovid's tale of Philomela (*Met.* vi.521) ⁴⁷ When Titus cries out, "Let my tears stanch etc." and develops the conceit, two distinct streams of association obscurely set memories stirring within us : (i) ritualistic ("the earth drinking blood"), and (ii) mythological ("the change of Philomel"). The barren earth had to be sprinkled according to primitive fertility rites with blood : an idea akin to that of stirring pity in the barren heart of Rome. But this regenerative theme is opposed by that of defloration evoked by persistent allusions to the Ovidian tale of Philomela towards the end of Marcus' speech. From now on the action will move inexorably towards a nemesis similar to the one we find in that story. The cause of sterility is hidden deep in the woods ("silvis obscura vetustis", Ovid : *Met.* VI. 521). Titus' incantation resembling a vegetation spell (ll. 16-21) is futile. The earth will yield no root.⁴⁸ The play will end with that gruesome inversion of reproduction : the womb becomes the tomb as Tamora eats her own flesh.

V

The central issue relating to freedom has varied, often paradoxical, aspects, which are expressed by a group of images in these plays : prison, tomb or grave, pit, hovel, forest, cave etc. In the opening scene of *Titus Andronicus* the tomb of the Andronici and the appearance of Tamora as a prisoner against that sombre setting reveal a strategy which makes the action of that play turn on the pivotal irony of the situation⁴⁹. Here at the beginning Titus stands between the tomb and Tamora, his prisoner. Gradually a reversal sets in. At the end that tomb swallows all, but not before Tamora herself becomes the tomb of her own flesh.⁵⁰ Unconscious irony is mingled with conscious gallantry in Titus' words : 'Now, Madam, are you prisoner to an emperor.' It is she who imprisons the emperor and his judgement in her amorous snares. But this is not all. As Aaron informs us in his opening soliloquy (II. i), Tamora is herself the prisoner of the Moor. He is a slave promoted to Machiavellian eminence as he 'mounts aloft' with his imperial

mistress. The image is heightened by the erotic evocation of 'mount', and 'prisoner' is equivocal, too ("fettered in amorous snares"), leading unexpectedly to a quaint use of the image of Prometheus, prisoner of Zeus.

The tragic associations give way to erotic ones. Tamora is bound to Aaron's amorous chains as fast as Prometheus was to a rock : only it gives her pleasure, not pain. There is also something less obvious in the way this image has been contrived. The black Aaron is something of a raven⁵¹, if not explicitly a vulture. He does feed upon her flesh, thrives on it almost. This carnal feast hinted at obliquely here at the beginning leads to a sequence of events culminating in a Thyestean banquet analogous to the one served by Procne to Tereus. This, we perceive, is the other side of the shield. Here is the dual irony of imprisonment. The complex role of Fortune in the scheme of this revenge tragedy is grasped in the pointed irony of the second line of Aaron's soliloquy : 'Safe out of Fortune's shot.' Aaron has of course 'cast away slavish weeds and servile thoughts.' But Tamora has not only turned from base prisoner to Queen ; she has, by implication, become Fortune herself. She bestows her favours on Aaron as freely as Fortune on her favourites. Described as goddess in the next line, she is also a siren and a nymph. We may think of Machiavelli's famous description of Fortune as a woman.⁵² Still, as the other banquet reveals, Tamora is no more free than Titus. None is free : to each his chains. 'Indupedita suis fatalibus omnia vinclis.' (Lucretius : *De Rerum Natura*, V. 874). Tamora's undoing is linked to her 'amorous fetters', Titus' to his fetters of 'honour'.

The forest and the pit which is dug for Titus' sons, for Bassianus and also for Lavinia's honour, provide the setting for action which clearly illustrates the turn of Fortune's wheel. Towards the end of II. i Aaron counsels the sons of Tamora : "The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf and dull : / There speak and strike, brave boys, and take your turns." Titus enters with his three sons. shouting : 'The hunt is up.' He invokes the brightness of the morning, the fragrance of the fields and the verdure of the woods. The cruel irony of all this is audibly enhanced by his own lusty ringing of the hunter's peal. In the next scene Tamora herself expands rather

exquisitely this note of lyric exultation in her own lovely description of the forest bathed in light and melody and a morning made for possessing 'a golden slumber'. But the cue for turning a sweet summer's morn into one unending, bitter, black night of horror comes from Aaron who declares his allegiance to Saturn. There is something of this saturnine inspiration that Tamora imbibes from Aaron in her description of the spot chosen for the horrid crime :

A barren detested vale you see it is ;
 The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,
 O'ercome with moss and baleful mistletoe :
 Here never shines the sun : here nothing breeds,
 Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven : - (II. iii. 93-7)

Notice the sudden transformation of the woods. The sudden flight of all signs of hope, life and fruitfulness makes the air heavy with foreboding. An apt parallel to Tamora's description of the spot is to be found in *Thyestes*, where the Messenger describes the 'secret spot', 'deep withdrawn', 'containing in a deep vale an ancient grove', the 'Kingdom's innermost retreat'. (Seneca : *Thyestes*, 650-678).

The symbolic use of the pit, analogous to that of the grove in *Thyestes*, is suggested by the way Shakespeare chooses to build it up from the mouth downwards, and again, from the bottom upwards in II. iii, 198-236.⁵³ The expression, "the ragged entrails of the pit" (*TA* II. iii, 230), suggests a monstrous animal ⁵⁴ "... this fell devouring receptacle/As hateful as Cocytus' misty mouth." (II. iii. 235-6).

The scene, we may recall, opens with Aaron entering with a bag of gold. The elder-tree under which the gold is buried overshades the mouth of the pit. The traditional association of gold with cavernous pits heightens the meaning of the phrase, "the ragged entrails of the pit." In *Timon* gold alone fills the world with evil. In IV. iii. 23 Timon is discovered in the woods, digging. "Earth yield me roots", he says. "Who seeks for better", he continues, "of thee, sause his palate / With thy most operant poison." Immediately, he asks, "What is here ? / Gold ? Yellow, glittering, precious gold ?"⁵⁵

The symbolic use of the pit and the forest in Act II of *TA* shows how the hunt in that play came to possess Shakespeare's imagination.

In a sense, of course, all these characters—Titus, Timon and Lear—resemble hunted animals. They are all caught ‘in the world’s great snare’. In *TA* no sooner is the hunt introduced as an episodic detail, than it is given a sinister extension. Aaron coins the metaphor and Lavinia turns into a doe. The wood becomes the wood in Ovid’s tale of Philomela, and the hunt becomes another hunt of an altogether different kind. Aaron’s policy and stratagem thus ‘find the path’ :

The forest walks are wide and spacious ;
And many unfrequented plots there are
Fitted by kind for rape and villainy. (II. i 114-116)

Venery indeed has been an archaic equivoke. In *Ars Amatoria*. Bk. I, Ovid says :

The huntsman knows where best his toils to lay
And in what dale the foaming bear to slay.

For ‘the foaming bear’ of Ovid’s somewhat robust eroticism we have the pathetic ‘dainty doe’ in Shakespeare (*TA* II. ii. 25-6).

It appears from II. i. 127-8 quoted earlier, that the image of the wood was coming to be associated with the most poignant detail in the story of Philomela : her tongueless grief.⁵⁶ The green wood, so poetically described earlier, turns into a loathsome pit⁵⁷, the hunters into the hunted, and Lavinia loses her honour and her tongue, because the woods cannot speak. In spite of the tendency, widely noted, towards looseness and diffusion in the play, there is some effort towards economy and concentration in the coalescence of each separate detail of the hunt-episode—the wood, the pit and the gruesome crime—in the imagery.

One image seems to press against another like the inmates of a dark and crowded dungeon. The forest and the pit do in fact extend symbolically the significance of the theme of imprisonment. The detail of Lavinia’s tongueless grief intensifies it. Speech is shut up forever, while death, a merciful release, is denied :

Sorrow concealed, like an oven stopp’d,
Doth burn the heart to cinders where it is.” (*TA* II. iv. 36-7)

In III. ii Titus, lacking hands to ‘passionate’ his ‘tenfold grief’ expresses the futility of a prisoner :

This poor right hand of mine
Is left to tyrannise upon my breast ;
Who, when my heart, all mad with misery,
Beats in this hollow prison of my flesh,
Then thus I thump it down. (III. ii. 7-11)

What can such a prisoner of chance do to assuage his grief ? The path he has to find out leads back to the forest : down the bottomless pit all the way to the nether Kingdom of Pluto, where awaits Revenge.⁵⁹

In IV. i. 96-102, when the secret is known, Titus renews with an ironic point the animal imagery of a hunt. We are once more in the thick of a hunt. The huntsman now is Titus himself. In IV. iii, attended by Marcus, Lucius and others, he enters ‘in his ecstasy’ bearing arrows. He wants to catch fugitive justice, since “*Terras Astraea reliquit*”. We notice now the cosmic extension of the forest. Titus would have the ocean sounded.⁶⁰ “Happily you may catch her in the sea.” The sea, symbol of his boundless grief, possesses him. His quest soon takes a direction which reveals the submerged association of the pit with hell, Pluto’s region. “ ‘Tis you”, he says, turning to Publius and Sempronius, “must dig with mattock and with spade, / And pierce the inmost centre of the earth”. (IV. iii. 10-12). That pit in II. iii, an image of horror lodged ‘within the book and volume of his brain’, comes to life in this intense, manic conviction that if you dig deep enough, you are bound to reach Pluto’s region.

The fanciful episode of archery that follows (IV. iii. 51-75) reveals whence these arrows have sprung. The grotesque irony of Titus’ archery deepens, if we see that the pit was associated in his tormented mind with the shafts of cruel lust. A parallel entanglement, induced also by the theme of love perverted into lust, is observed in *Lr.* IV. vi. 138-9. The blind Gloucester is grotesquely transformed in Lear’s eyes into the figure of blind Cupid. He asks, “Dost thou know me ?”, and Lear says, “Dost thou squint at me ? No, do thy worst, blind Cupid.”⁶¹

The two pigeons in *Titus* IV. iii. 76, taken as carrier pigeons, are connected in Titus’ mind with news from heaven, the post he has

been waiting for. The arrows sent flying now come back (in his mind) in the shape of pigeons.⁶² The point about the fanciful analogy between bird and arrow is that as flying objects they stir in Titus' 'distracted globe' a yearning for freedom, if only justice would extend its helping hand. If justice be tardy, he would rather court Revenge. Giving up his futile search, he would punish the malefactors himself. This gross mingling of policy and madness is absent in the corresponding scene in *Lr.* IV. vi. In Lear's mind the problem of justice and the problem of freedom are indissolubly linked. The counterproof is that there is a see-saw in his speeches here between images of outraged authority and of riotous appetite. Discovering the extent of the reign of appetite amounting to a total subversion of order, he struggles to find a way out of the chaos. The agony of the struggle is felt in : "there's hell, there's darkness, / There is the sulphurous pit." (IV. vi. 129-30). The intolerable strain of the quest culminates in a great wrench. His reason gives way, but this alone can oppose that other madness, the throwing off of all restraint : "The wren goes to't and the small gilded fly/Doth lecher in my sight." (IV. vi. 112-13). His poor, perplexed brain is tormented by a riddle : "... change places, and handy-dandy which is the justice, which is the thief ?" (IV. vi. 152-3). He concludes, "None does offend, none, I say, none." So there is nothing for it but to run. There is a symbolic gesture at the end of this speech ; it makes articulate his feverish impatience to be free : "Pull off my boots ; harder, harder ; so." His mind had been wandering since his entry in the scene. Yet a strange, manic tenacity runs through thoughts of freedom to be won after a battle. When Cordelia's gentleman enters, he fears arrest : "No rescue ? What ! a prisoner ? I am even/The natural fool of Fortune" (IV. vi. 191-2) "Fantastically dressed with wild flowers," he is surprised that he can still be known as King. "Then there's life in it", he says, meaning there is majesty in the plain weeds of nature. He can assert his freedom only by running away : "Nay, an you get it, you shall get it by running" (IV. vi. 203-4). It may be a mock challenge to the gentleman whom he proposes to outrun. It may also be addressed to himself : he probably recognizes intuitively that the only way to get his kingdom back is by way of running away from it. That had been his sole quest : freedom from oppressive care ("while we/Unburthen'd

crawl toward death" : I. 1. 40-1). He had to learn thereafter that the most oppressive burden is that of excessive ego or self-concern. We know what it cost him. The kingdom he was on the point of winning in the end is that of the mind : of 'free and patient thoughts'. The recurrence of images of stress and torture is relevant only in the light of Shakespeare's maturest exploration of the common theme of freedom from a plague located in oneself. In the purgatorial scene that follows, IV. vii, the moving accents that reveal Lear's clear recognition of his error and the attendant humility, lend a resonance to the note of imminent redemption :

You do me wrong to take me out o' th' grave ;
 Thou art a soul in bliss ; but I am bound
 Upon a wheel of fire, ... (IV. vii. 45-7)

In the last act both Lear and Cordelia become prisoners (V. iii). To Lear it hardly makes any difference, because he believes he has won his kingdom. There has been much hectic running to and fro in the play. Lear has paid the price of not knowing what he was running away from and what he was running towards. He has learnt that one cannot run away from oneself. Now, in this last act, all this wandering, this futile striving, has come to a rest, and Lear welcomes this arrest. We can see how far he has progressed since he rushed out in blind rage into the storm, heedless of warning. Now, secure in his possession of the inner kingdom, Lear, with one sweeping gesture, dismisses the world as but a larger prison. Unlike Timon, he accepts his prison. His finer insight gives a new turn to the idea, revealing a new relation between the prison and the free spirit which it cannot confine. When, at the beginning of V. iii, Lear and Cordelia enter as prisoners, Cordelia grieves :

For thee, oppressed King, I am cast down ;
 Myself could else outfrown Fortune's frown. (II. 5-6)

Lear's reply is startling :

No, no, no, no ! Come, let's away to prison,
 We two alone will sing like birds i'th' cage.

This bird-song is a triumph of the imagination. It shows also how far Shakespeare has travelled, since he used the bird motif central

to *Titus* : "the change of Philomel". The song we hear annihilates the contradiction between the bird and the cage. This vision of life, this sense of 'the mystery of things', retains its power in spite of Cordelia's death and Lear's :

... ... so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies
And take upon's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies. (ll. 11-17)

There is a wealth of meaning in this new status of man : his elevation from being 'even the natural fool of Fortune' to becoming God's spy.⁶³ The power of Fortune is nullified :

. we'll wear out,
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones
That ebb and flow by th' moon

Goneril, Regan, Edmund : they are all now in Fortune's grip. They all fell, one by one, exemplifying the ways of Fortune with those who overreach themselves, goaded by greed and cunning. But Lear miraculously escapes : death, in a sense, touches neither him, nor Cordelia. The bird-image vaguely stirs in our minds as Lear, stooping over Cordelia, says : "This feather stirs". (V. iii. 265). The homely, "creatural" gesture.⁶⁴ "Pray you, undo this button", lends stage-life to the symbolic urge for freedom 'from all cruel restraint' of a world governed by Chance.

VI

To many readers Lear's last words signify nothing. For them only blind chance has had the last say and Lear, as he dies, is a victim of delusion as he was at the beginning : he would at best seem to have exchanged one kind of delusion for another. With Cordelia's death his own suffering and, consequently, the play itself is robbed of whatever meaning it had acquired earlier.

The truth is that the meaning of life co-exists here, as elsewhere in Shakespeare, with its meaninglessness, and the one does not cancel the other. They are locked as in an eternal combat.⁶⁵ The meaning of life, therefore, cannot be isolated from its meaninglessness. In

thus setting in motion an incessant oscillation between these two poles to bring about our simultaneous perception of either, Shakespeare has grasped the total meaning of life. Mere hostility is transformed into amicable reciprocity, not by annulling but by heightening the conflict as far as possible : that is the privilege of the artist, especially of the dramatist, if he is of the calibre of Shakespeare.

It is wrong, therefore, to reach a single conclusion about a Shakespearean play, especially *King Lear*. As soon as we form one, it breaks down. Our minds, instantly assailed by doubt, tend to swing back to the opposite view, but will not rest there either. Shakespeare's greatness lies in his ability to evoke simultaneously and maintain, in perennial tension, these contradictory responses. He frees us, in other words, from any dogmatic commitment to a single point of view. It is, ultimately, in this sense that in a play like *King Lear* he creates a freedom that is truly human : the freedom which art alone confers on man, beset as he is in life, viewed tragically, by a chain of circumstances leading inevitably to defeat and death. As a work of art, a play like *King Lear* is set free from that deterministic necessity which governs the realm of nature.⁶⁶ On the level of the plot, if action is crudely interpreted as deeds that are done or outer happenings, chance or necessity triumphs. But there is such a thing as the fate of the play itself as determined by the maker himself, a work so constructed that not a single detail can be taken away or so much as transposed⁶⁷ and the whole satisfies us as being what it is, since we cannot conceive of it as being anything else. This feeling that it cannot be other than what it is, constitutes its poetic truth. It is superior to fate, because it fills our minds with a rare satisfaction, amounting almost to a sense of triumph, even as we grieve over the individual fate of the hero. The hero, in other words, is greater than what he does, or what happens to him.⁶⁸ The meaning of what he is or becomes, i. e. his character or inner life, as it develops in course of the action, is not annulled by the apparent meaninglessness of his defeat and death : it is not unmade by his unmaking. This process of inner development made *visible*, as it were, in the performance of the entire play, this creation of a sense of the inner life of the character is the true action.⁶⁹ This is the artistic transmutation of that logical necessity which came to oppose tempo-

ral necessity in the thought of Democritus,⁷⁰ concurrently with the growth of an ethical necessity, "of the ethical self as opposed to an all powerful fate", in response to the demands of human dignity. Judged by the mere sequence of temporal events, the play, as it ends, may appear meaningless. Such, we believe, was the experience of Dr. Johnson who found it unbearably painful. But this is only one phase of the total movement of the play. The "spiritual circle"⁷¹ is completed, and ever renewed when, even as it reaches the nadir, the play ascends to the intelligible sphere. The hero, too, ascends even as his fate descends on him.⁷²

We find, therefore, that Shakespeare's progress lies in his growing mastery in creating this double movement which expresses the true substance of the soul in Neo-Platonic thought.⁷³ The soul, so conceived, expresses and unifies all the differences that are in the body, all the changes taking place within it. Shakespeare's art of characterization may be seen in the light of this objectification of the principle of subjectivity.⁷⁴ It is in this sense that the character of Hamlet, for example, contains within it all the multiplicity, 'the infinite variety', that constitutes the play. We may apply to the shaping power behind it all that leads the play to its destined end the words of Hamlet himself : "There's a divinity that shapes our ends,/ Rough-hew them how we will." (V. ii. 10-11).

The transformation that makes the soul of the play, i.e., the character of the hero, the true form of the body of the play includes, along with the transformation of a logical, merely fortuitous necessity into artistic, that of time as a dimension and constitutive element of tragic experience. Significantly, there is a reference to this at the end of the play when Edgar says : "The weight of this sad time we must obey." The weight or measure he speaks of is felt in the theatre as silence falls, a silence that is created, "the load of eternal quietude."⁷⁵ At once we pass from the sphere of individual grief to a whole universe of sorrow. Edgar says in that passage, "We that are young shall never see *so much*, nor live *so long*." (V. iii. 325-6 : italics mine). This recalls his words to Albany earlier : as Albany confesses his inability to support the load of woe : "If there be *more, more woeful*, hold it in ; / For I am ready to dissolve,/Hearing of this," (V. iii. 202-4), Edgar says :

This would have seem'd a period
 To such as love not sorrow ; but another,
 To *amplify too much*, would make *much more*,
And top extremity. (V. iii. 205-8 : italics mine).

Surely, this love of sorrow regarded as the basic constituent of the tragic vision of life, has an affinity with the lesson learnt by Apollo in Mnemosyne's silent face, that "Knowledge enormous" that "makes a God of" him (*Hyperion*, Bk. III, 113), or the "power within", we read of in the revised *Hyperion*, Canto I, "of enormous ken/To see as a god sees, and take the depth/Of things as nimbly as the outward eye/Can size and shape pervade." (*Fall of Hyperion*, Canto I, 303-6).

This immeasurable depth is the dimension lent by time, this "sad time", to tragic life. The stoic gesture of obedience also points to the central lesson, if at all we must draw a lesson from Shakespeare's treatment of life in his tragedies. As Lear says to Gloucester in the scene that has been discussed earlier : "Thou must be patient ; we came crying hither" (IV. vi. 182). Edgar, too, had advised his father earlier : "Bear free and patient thoughts" (IV. vi. 80) This is how the heroic freedom of the human spirit is ultimately defined in Shakespeare in terms of fortitude, of obedience to the "weight of this sad time."

Among the three plays chosen for this brief study of the interplay of fortune and freedom, *King Lear* is the finest in its expression of the theme of freedom that is truly human. The idea is all but submerged in *Titus Andronicus* ; it has to struggle against the atrocious Senecan matter. By the time he came to write *Timon* Shakespeare had, as we have seen, taken a major step towards articulating the question of freedom. In *Lear* the idea is fused with the action of the play as determined by and objectified in character-creation. In discussing these three plays in this order, i.e., *Titus*, *Timon* and *Lear*, I may seem to have ignored the question of their chronological succession. I do recognize that the problem exists, but I do not think that the major conclusions that I have drawn regarding the movement of Shakespeare's thought, as reflected in his modes of presentation of the basic conflict, are affected by it. The kind of logic that we imply in accepting chronology as a key to development,

artistic or intellectual, is not of much use in understanding the movement of the mind of an artist as great as Shakespeare. The Sonnets, for example, baffle all attempt at imposing a strict chronological sequence upon them. I am inclined to believe that theology rather than logic may take us nearer the Shakespearean spirit, though the relative concepts of proximity and distance are irrelevant, when we are dealing with the infinite. Adapting a formula which has a long history⁷⁶ we may apply to the Shakespearean universe the idea of the cosmic sphere "whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere." From this point of view, as it appeared to Nicholas Cusanus in his depiction of the physical cosmos or of the cosmos of religions,⁷⁷ the cosmos—everything in it—is equally near and far from the Creator. That is not to say that all value judgments—the distinction between the higher and the lower, the greater and the lesser—are abolished. *Titus* is indeed the lesser play and *Lear*, by far the greater. But it is no static hierarchy, once we see the dynamic function⁷⁸ of the universe so envisaged, the motion of the spirit that "has become in a true sense the 'bond of the world' ".⁷⁹ The more clearly we grasp this inviolable unity, the more keenly we become aware of the otherness that separates one play from the other. There is as little similarity between the two plays, i.e., *Titus* and *Lear*, as between the two divisions of the Platonic cosmos, the physical and the ideal, crude matter and pure form. But using the words of Cassirer we may say, "the division ... does not cut through the vital nerve of experience itself".⁸⁰

Finally, a word about the mode of imagery-study attempted in this essay. Any analysis of dramatic imagery, being pre-determined, runs the risk of reducing the play to a set of abstractions. So reduced, the play is no longer what it ought to be : something to be felt and imagined. In poetic drama like Shakespeare's what, we may ask, is the common content of all the diverse symbols and images ? Just as what all religious symbols assert is the idea of God, no matter in what shape, so in dramatic poetry all images must be the affirmation of a unified emotional experience. "What remains", after analysis, "is a direction, an orientation of our thoughts toward a most lofty universal concept."⁸⁰ Such is the concept of human freedom as treated by Shakespeare in these plays.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See the author's "A Note on *Titus Andronicus* II. i. 1-11", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, U.S.A., Summer, 1961. The manner in which the image of the mountain-top is followed by that of the golden sun may recall the opening of Sonnet 33.
2. See J. Isaacs, "Shakespeare as Man of the Theatre" in *Shakespeare Criticism* 1919-35 ed. Anne Bradby (World's Classics), p. 310.
3. We may recall in this connexion the Painter's words : "You do well/To show Lord Timon that mean eyes have seen/The foot above the head". (*T. of A.* I. i. 95-7).
4. By contrast the Stoic philosopher has only to stand *as a rock* to preach endurance. Cf. "Thou must be like a promontory of the sea, against which though the waves beat continually, yet it both itself stands, and about it are those swelling waves stilled and quieted." Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (Everyman's Library), Bk. IV, xl, p. 40. See also the allegorical portrait of Sir John Luttrell after the painting by Hans Eworth (c. 1520-73) as reproduced in *The Literature of Renaissance England* ed. Hollander and Kermode, New York, 1973, pl. 6. Inscribed on the rock at the left are the verses : "More than the rock amid the raging seas/The constant heart no danger dreads, nor fears".
5. W. Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy*, p. 108. All these appear in *Timon*: the first two in image-sequence, the third in setting. "The world, says a 14th Century poet once thought to be Richard Rolle, is like these four things: *the sea* which ebbs and flows, casts a man up to riches and honour, then down to tribulations, *a wilderness* full of wild beasts; *a forest* full of thieves and outlaws which rob a man of all he has and *a field of battle*, since the world fights against man with two hands, the right hand of wealth and the left hand of poverty."
6. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
7. For the knee-eagle-wax linkage see E. A. Armstrong, *Shakespeare's Imagination*, p. 37.
8. "Till swollen with cunning of a self-conceit/His waxen wings did mount above her reach,/And melting heavens conspired his overthrow"
9. J. C. Maxwell, *Introduction* to his edition (NCS) of the play, xxxv-xxxvi.
10. Farnham, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
11. Cf. "... Tragedy shows humanity in the grip of circumstance, of fate, of what our people call 'the thing will happen', 'the woman in the stars that does all', ... Well, you put your actor in the grip of this woman, in the claws of the cat. Once in that grip you know what the end must be. You may let your hero kick or struggle, but he is in the claws all the time. It is a mere question as to how nearly you will let him escape and

- when you will allow the pounce." Lady Gregory : *New Irish Comedies, Notes*, pp. 158-9. (Quoted in The *Irish Dramatic Movement* by Una Ellis Fermor, p. 66.)
12. See Mark van Doren, *Shakespeare*, London, 1941, p. 289.
 13. See J. C. Maxwell : Intro., *T. of A.* (NCS), xxxv.
 14. Lamb, *Imperfect Sympathies* in "Essays of Elia" (1st Series) ed. Hallward and Hill, p. 82.
 15. Contrast the notion of Epicurean friendship as an end in itself, forming an integral part of wisdom "The exchange of thoughts and the support derived from mutual affection no longer serve only to give mutual strength ... they are the end in themselves ; in these heart to heart exchanges lies that peace of the soul which is perfect happiness." (A. J. Festugière : *Epicurus and his Gods* tr. C. W. Chilton, Oxford, 1955, p. 37). Here nothing is exchanged.
 16. Note also Timon's emphasis on the nature of true love in reply to 'honest' Ventidius : "I gave it freely ever". (I. ii. 9-11)
 17. See W. K. C. Guthrie : *The Greek Philosophers from Thales to Aristotle*, p. 51. On the twin principles of Love and Strife see H. Baker : *The Image of Man*, New York, 1961, p. 12. See R. Crashaw, *The Weeper*, ll. 101-2. A brief and lucid exposition of the Augustinian doctrine may be found in Verrier Elwin : *A Philosophy of Love*, Delhi, 1962.
 18. Quoted in Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
 19. M. Van Doren, *op. cit.*, p. 290.
 20. Cf. *T. of A.* I. ii. 9-11. The concept of universal brotherhood in love expounded by Timon later (ll. 101-5) resolves the apparent contradiction between this speech and the one in ll. 88-107. The kind of love expressed in some of Shakespeare's sonnets is not unlike that described in this extract from Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 12. See especially nos. 116, 119 (ll. 9-12).
 21. Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
 22. M. van Doren, *op. cit.*, p. 290.
 23. See E. C. Pettet's article in *RES* XXIII, Oct., 1947 (No. 92).
 24. Italics mine. The rich irony of this line should not be missed. This is the cue for the Old Man's metaphor of "pawn". The Old Man has only one measure of value. Love, honour and honesty—values real to Timon as seen in his response—are all meaningless in his world. Timon, however, cannot quite escape contamination. Yet his character is so presented as to provide a contrast, and his belief is transparent in a language of noble simplicity.
 25. See J. C. Maxwell, *Intro.* to *T. of A.* (NCS), xxii. As Maxwell says, "Timon cannot really overcome the subtle corruption exercised by the

- materialistic spirit of Athens ; he can only outbid it in his own currency of gold."
26. The analogy is expanded by Menenius Agrippa in *Cor.* I. i. 94-154. See Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry* ed. G. Shepherd, London, 1967, p. 114, ll. 35 ff. and Shepherd's note on p. 184.
 27. Quoted in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* by R. H. Tawney, pp. 37-8. Italics mine.
 28. See Note 55 on the traditional association of gold with death.
 29. See also Sonnet 7, l. 5 and *Titus* II. i. 5-8.
 30. Dante, *Paradiso* XIII, 67-72 ; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, tr. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, London, 1920, Part I, Question XIV, Art. 6, p. 192. "The diversity of colours is not caused by light only but by the different dispositions of the diaphanous medium which receives it". See also "The Pseudo-Dionysius on the Problem of Evil", extract from *The Divine Names*, reprinted in *Medieval Philosophy* ed. H. Shapiro, New York, 1964, pp. 45-48. The remarks on the sun's rays are relevant. In Plato's *Republic* the sun is called the image of the idea of the good. See *Rep.* VI, 507e-508c ; 514a-517c. See in this connexion P.O. Kristeller : *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance*, Ch. 7 (Patrizi), p. 120.
 31. "Plato's essential teaching is to show how to escape from the world of sense ... and use the heavenly Eros as a ladder towards the real eternal world that lies beyond." Elwin : *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22. Timon's banquet, as indicated in Cupid's speech (I. ii. 118-21), is a 'banquet of sense', a spectacular demonstration of what Timon calls 'society' (I. ii. 253) and Apemantus, 'pomps and vainglories'. It shows how Timon's fine nature becomes coarsened through habit. Apemantus' remark is a pointer : 'who lives that's not depravéd or depraves ?' (I. ii. 140). The Masque of the Amazons makes us realize that all this is far from being what it pretends to be : a jovial concert of the senses. Harmony is essential to health. *This* is what Flavius calls his 'flow of riot'.
 32. See Tawney : *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.
 33. See V. Elwin : *op. cit.*, p. 5.
 34. *Ib.*, p. 8. Cf. Dante : *Paradiso*, xxxiii, 145.
 35. Cf. *Ham.* II. ii. 181-2.
 36. See the concluding lines of *Timon* III. iv. "... let in the tide/Of knaves once more." Cf. "this great flood of visitors" (*Timon* I. i. 45).
 37. On the reflected light lent to the moon at night see Leonardo da Vinci's *Notebooks* (*Selections* ed. I. A. Richter, World's Classics, p. 53). The interpretation of the relation between the sea and the moon here by Timon is characteristic. He drags the chain of 'thievery' across the universe. To his obsessed mind the economy of the universe presents the same picture as economic life on earth, one of mutual depredation.

The very elements go on robbing one another: "each thing's a thief".

38. This idea of the heredity of man, his being the son of woman recurs in Shakespeare. Cf. *Ham.* IV. vii. 187-190. Something of the woman lingers in the male and comes out at moments like this. I am indebted for this observation to my teacher, the late Professor T. N. Sen of Presidency College, Calcutta.
39. A similar gap after l. 504 is probably filled in by a gesture terminating this brief moment of love and humility. The vigour of "I fell with curses" marks the swell of the returning tide of hatred. In the whole speech (ll. 493-513) there are as many as three short lines (493, 497 and 504), which leave quite some room for the actor to bring out the ebb and flow of love and hatred, of doubt and faith. The speech bears traces of the same hand that shaped the stormy passage of Lear's spirit.
40. The classic example is Milton's Satan with his vitriolic denunciations. Misanthropic indictment tends to become, ironically, self-indictment. Cf. Swift : *Gulliver's Travels*, Bk. IV, ch. xii. The distortion is brought about through excessive pride.
41. Cf. *Antony & Cleopatra* V. ii. 1-2.
42. A little earlier (V. i. 199-201) Timon says to the 2nd Senator : "... with other incident throes/That nature's fragile vessel doth sustain/In life's uncertain voyage etc." The image of a 'fragile vessel' on an 'uncertain voyage' suggests the familiar image of 'a sea of troubles'. Cf. *Ham.* III. i. 58, 62-3. The image of the sea, implicit here, emerges in Timon's last speech as one of exceptional beauty and grandeur.
43. See also *TA* III. i. 67.
44. Mark the parallel situation in *Timon* III. v, where Alciabiades tries all his captain's oratory in vain to move the even more hardened hearts of Athenian Senators to pity. Note also the parallel between *TA* III. i. 53-4 and *T. of A.* IV. i. 1-3.
45. Cf. *TA* III. i. 125-6.
46. In *PL* IV, 268-71 the flower motif is hauntingly evocative.
47. See Ovid, *Met.* vi. 521 ('silvis obscura vetustis').
48. Even so the earth appears to refuse to yield roots to Timon : IV. iii. 23.
49. J. C. Adams (in "Shakespeare's Revisions in *TA*", *SQ* XV, 2, 1964 p. 177 notes the spectacular boldness and variety of the opening action.
50. Cf. Ovid, *Met.* vi. 665 ('seque vocat bustum miserabile nati').
51. Cf. *TA* III. i. 158.
52. Cf. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. xxv, last prg. ("I certainly think that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, for fortune is a woman etc,").

- 53. Cf. Isaacs "Shakespeare as Man of the Theatre" in *Shakespeare Criticism, 1919-35*, p. 310.
- 54. Cf. Maxwell's remark on Timon's "embossed froth", *ed. cit*, p. 166.
- 55. Of money and gold L. da Vinci says in his *Notebooks* (ed. Richter) : "Out of cavernous pits a thing shall come forth which will make all the nations of the world toil and sweat with the greater torments, anxiety and labour, that they may gain its end." (P. 252).
- 56. Aaron says : "And strike her home by force, if not by words". "Words" : the word itself calls up other associations such as the one that begins to take shape in the ominous contrast between 'the palace full of tongues' and 'tongueless woods'.
- 57. See II. iii. 198 ("What subtle hole is this etc."). The suggested analogy of some loathsome animal is linked up with Aaron's sinister words which set the trap for the huntsmen : "Straight will I bring you to the loathsome pit/Where I espied the panther fast asleep". We also recall I. i. 493, as we realize it was Titus himself who began it all : "Tomorrow, an it please your majesty/To hunt the panther and the hart with me etc."
- 58. Here Shakespeare fails to give stage life to the idea of this cruel restraint. We have to wait till *Mac. IV. iii. 207-10* for "a scene of exquisite management and restraint" built around the theme of 'the grief that do's not speake'. See Isaacs (in the article cited, pp. 304-5) on the stage quality of these lines in contrast with the crude stage business in *TA*.
- 59. See III. i. 217-8, 271.
- 60. It is interesting to compare the manner in which depths are sounded in *Lr. III. iv. 36-7*. See also III. vi. 28. The rain and the puddles that form inside make all the difference.
- 61. Earlier in the same scene (IV. vi.) there is archery : "That fellow handles his bow like a crow-keeper..... O, well-flown bird ! etc."
- 62. Compare the analogous trick in *Lr. IV. vi. 91*.
- 63. To a Renaissance thinker this would be an apt image of man as God created him : His 'spy'. "We have set thee at the world's centre that thou mayest from thence more easily observe whatever is in the world". (Pico's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, tr. E. L. Forbes, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* ed Cassirer, Kristeller and Randall. p. 229). See however, for a different interpretation of V. iii 16-17, W. R. Elton : "Shakespeare and the Thought of his Age" in *A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies* ed. K. Muir & S. Schoenbaum, 1979, p. 184.
- 64. See Auerbach, E. : *Mimesis*, tr. W. R. Trask, Princeton, 1971, p. 371. ("Yet we do not laugh, we weep, and not only in pity but at the same time in admiration for such greatness which seems only the greater and more indestructible in its brittle creaturelyness.")

65. Compare the metaphor used by Coleridge in describing the characteristics of "original poetic genius": "In Shakespeare's *poems* the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a war embrace. Each in its excess of strength seems to threaten the extinction of the other. At length in the DRAMA they were reconciled, and fought each with its shield before the breast of the other." (*Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross, Vol. II, p. 19 : ch. xv). This mutual antegonism, which acts as a constant challenge or provocation to each to hold its own without yielding to the other, is well described by the Sanskrit aesthetician, Kuntaka, discoursing on word and meaning in his *Vakroktijivita* as "parasparaspardhitva" (*Vakroktijivita of Kuntaka* ed. S. K. De, Calcutta, 1961, p. 12 : in the comm. on *Prathamamneśa*, sl. 7).

With the idea, common to Coleridge and the Sanskrit aesthetician, that 'opposition is true friendship', compare Valéry on the essential principle of the mechanics of poetry and his illustration of the pendulum oscillating between two symmetrical points, one representing form, the other, meaning or content in "Poetry and Abstract Thought" in *The Art of Poetry*, Vol. VII, Collected Works ed. J. Matthews, London, 1971.

This idea of the relationship between form and matter has been used here to suggest the kind of relationship that exists between the meaning of life and its meaninglessness in Shakespeare.

66. This is how Mammata defined poetry: *niyatik; taniyamarahita*, i.e., "without the restraint of Nature's laws", or, rather, "free from the law of (fortuitous) necessity" (*Kavyaprakasa* with Eng. tr. by G. N. Jha, Varanasi, 1967, Ch. I : 'Prathama Ullāsa ; Sloka 1).

The poet cuts the cable that moors tragedy to the domain of the contingent.

67. See Aristotle : *The Art of Poetry* tr. I. Bywater, ch. 8, p. 42. See also Jacques Maritain : *Art and Scholasticism* tr. J. F. Scanlan, London, 1934, p. 12 on the answer of the Schoolmen to the question, "How is it possible to make the intellect infallibly true in the domain of the individual and the contingent?"

68. Compare the implication of the Protestant doctrine of predestination that grace is independent of good works and, therefore, a man is greater than his deeds. See A Hauser : *Mannerism* tr. E. Mosbacher, London, 1965, Vol. I, p. 139.

69. See in this connexion Daniel Seltzer : *Prince Hal and Tragic Style* in "Shakespeare Survey", No. 30.

70. "Men have fashioned an image of Chance as an excuse for their own stupidity." (Fragment 119, ed. Diels). See E. Cassirer : *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, tr. R. Manheim, Vol. II, Yale University Press, 1955, pp. 131-2.

71. I have used here the concept of a *circultus spiritualis*. See Cassirer : *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* tr. M. Domandi, Oxford, 1963, pp. 132-4. If the argument is valid, the introduction of what Cassirer calls the 'dynamic motif' which penetrates the static complex of the universe, clearly shows an advance, characteristic of a mode of thinking influential in Shakespeare's time, compared with the static medieval figure of the hill of fortune discussed at the beginning of this article.
72. See A. Hauser : *Mannerism*, ch. ix (especially Section 3 entitled "The Birth of Modern Tragedy"), pp. 137-40. The interpretation attempted here follows Cassirer and points to a conclusion different from Hauser's. There may be a good deal in a play like *Hamlet*, or *King Lear* that anticipates modern tragedy. This does not rule out, however, the presence of a creative idea governing the meaning and structure of the entire play that is not incompatible with a contemporary strain of thought as interpreted by Cassirer in his classic exposition referred to here (see notes 71, 73 and 74).
73. Cassirer : *The Individual and the Cosmos*, ch. 4 ("The Subject-Object Problem"), p. 125. ("Precisely this double movement expresses the constitution of the true substance of the soul.")
74. Cassirer : *Ib.*, p. 126.
75. Keats ; The revised *Hyperion* ("The Fall of Hyperion"), Bk. I, 1. 390.
73. See Robin Small : *Nietzsche and a Platonist Idea of Cosmos : Centre Everywhere, Circumference Nowhere*, (Journal of the History of Ideas, Jan.-Mar. 1983, Vol. XIV, No. 1, pp. 89-104).
77. Cassirer : *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
80. Karl Vossler : *Medieval Culture*, tr. W. C. Lawton, London, 1929, Vol. I, p. 89.

KING LEAR : A DARK SYNTHESIS LEADING NOWHERE

GAURI PRASAD GHOSH

[This essay forms part of a serial which seeks to trace the course of Shakespeare's philosophical evolution through the 'Tragic Period'. Previous chapters on *Hamlet*, on the 'Problem Plays' and on *Othello* came out in recent issues of this journal, and a completed but unpublished chapter on *Timon* is expected to provide the necessary link between the studies of the *Othello* and *Lear* stages. This study of the Tragic Phase, again, forms part of a larger design which seeks to present a new interpretation of the development of Shakespeare's life-vision, the first part of which was published by Orient Longman Ltd., Calcutta, in 1971 under the title *The Mystery of Prospero's Vision*.]

No notes are appended to the present essay as there are very few specific references to critical opinions. That in a general way I am indebted to numerous critics and interpreters hardly needs mention but the present interpretation of what I would call the *Lear* phase of the process is, as far as I am aware, my own.]

I. A DIARCHY OF VISIONS

If we look down the sequence of plays in the earlier half of Shakespeare's 'Tragic Period' stretching roughly between 1600 and 1604, we shall find a peculiar duality of vision, an almost parallel operation of two different thought-processes, proceeding from two different kinds of reaction to the presence of evil in life. One of them manifests itself in the more or less harmonious character-dominated realism of the tragedies, *Hamlet* and *Othello*, while the other keeps struggling for expression in the clumsily purposeful patchworks of the three so-called Problem Plays and in the explosive misanthropy of *Timon*. The elements of the duality had appeared for the first time in the powerful but puzzling tragedy of *Hamlet*.

which bears within the framework of its tragic vision glimpses of a mood of cynical disenchantment. But after *Hamlet* the two elements mysteriously diverge and appear separately as two kinds of vision or attitude in the two types of plays appearing almost in a process of alternation which runs as follows : *Hamlet*, 'Troilus', 'All's Well', *Othello* 'Measure for Measure', 'Timon'. The integrated tragedies, *Hamlet* and *Othello*, represent the peak of the steadily developing Shakespearian realism and present, in spite of their tragic bias and their intense vision of evil, a gloriously balanced view of life governed by an almost flawless chain of causation. But the three so-called Problem Plays belonging to the same general period, followed by the somewhat kindred play of *Timon*, suggest a loss of faith in the civilized values, in human standards of judgment and in the great importance attached to individual character in the contemporary tragedies, particularly in *Othello*. In the tragedies evil, however potent and terrible, is found to have a pattern, and life is myriad-hued in spite of the dark taint of evil. In the Problem Plays and in *Timon*, on the other hand, the landscape of life is evil-splattered. In the tragedies the consciousness of evil has the effect of deepening realism. In the four plays of the other group the obsessive awareness of evil has the effect of disintegrating realism. The marvellously naturalistic portrayal of character and situation in the tragedies is replaced in the Problem Plays and in *Timon* by a strained and rigid symbolism. This curious alternation of the tragic-comic patchworks with the tragedies confronts us with a curious alternation of two different ways of reacting to the evil-ridden scene of life. While the profoundest realism, in which a disquieting sense of evil is woven into a fascinating design of life, was building up in *Hamlet* and *Othello*, the Problem Plays, climaxed by *Timon*, were presenting in successive waves a disintegration of that very kind of character-based realistic vision.

Till the composition of *Timon* towards the end of 1604 or the early days of 1605 we find these two attitudes of the Shakespearian mind keeping somewhat apart, operating alternately rather than simultaneously. They trace out two distinct patterns (involving sub-patterns, of course) in the two kinds of plays, the integrated tragedies and tragic-comic plays embodying a strained negative vision. I have had occasion to compare this oscillation with the eclipsing

binaries in the astronomical world, two stars of unequal size and radiance and colour revolving round and alternately obscuring one another with curiously varying effects. But the process may perhaps be described in altogether different terms. We may perhaps imagine that during these years the creeping shadows of disintegration that we come across in the Problem Plays and in *Timon* could not substantially affect the central stage of the Shakespearian mind as long as it was occupied with deep-toned tragic visions of the life of man. For a time, curiously, these shadows of disillusionment hung like a dark ring of clouds on the night horizon, leaving unaffected the sombre starlit glory of the central regions. But this diarchy of life-visions could not go on indefinitely in a single mind. The cloud-belt had either to disperse shortly or to engulf the whole starlit dome. The two attitudes had sooner or later to come to grips, resulting in the dominance of the one and subduing of the other, or else in an inextricable mingling of the two—giving rise in either case to a new quality of vision.

II. THE VISIONS INTERPENETRATE

The vague symbolic tendencies expressive of a shifting negative vision that we find raising their heads in the Problem Plays were however too deep-rooted, too much of a vital development of the poet's total response to life to peter out after a brief spell of disturbance. The fiery resurgence of that haunting sense of human evil in *Timon* after the cynico-compassionate view of human failings in *Measure for Measure* shows that the new negative attitude, whatever its exact nature, was still very much there in Shakespeare's mind—a force to be reckoned with. And it was not a static smudge ; it was a moving, developing phenomenon, 'a looming bastion fringed with fire'. With the composition of *Timon*, which marks the extreme frontier of the negative vision, the moment had been reached when the two attitudes as reflected in the richly realistic tragic plays and in the clumsily symbolical and negative-toned Problem Plays (taken to their climax in *Timon*) had both attained the height of power : the two armies stood face to face in full array disputing the possession of the Shakespearian mind. The clash that took place was long and for a time undecided. And the first stage of the grappling of the two attitudes we come across in the two supreme tragic masterpieces of *King Lear* and *Macbeth*.

King Lear and *Macbeth* are miraculous not only in their power and beauty ; their inner constitutions, the combination of opposite qualities in them, present a no less rare miracle. The two contrasted attitudes of the Shakespearian mind, so long operating in a strange process of alteration, meet like two opposing armies in these two masterpieces. The encounter that follows takes a peculiarly mingled form. The two forces, instead of meeting along a distinct line of contact, are swallowed up in each other. Their ranks interpenetrate over the entire field ; their colours mingle inextricably. While meeting in opposition, they present in the first stages of their encounter a strange coalescence of contraries, a marvellous compound of opposites, a pattern of profound artistic beauty. It is the momentary artistic blending of these two contrary visions of the Shakespearian mind that it is our business to trace now, first in *King Lear* and then in *Macbeth*, before we pass on to the later stages of the encounter.

It is strange that the very forces that gradually bring about the disintegration of Shakespeare's realistic vision are harnessed in *King Lear* to deepen and enlarge the tragic vision and to create the most overwhelming effects. Here, even more than in *Hamlet*, we feel that some other and deeper meaning or meanings are sought to be conveyed than what have been concretely expressed through the chain of events and the interaction of the characters. Only, while in *Hamlet* this extra-deep element is confined almost entirely to the thoughts and gestures of the hero, in *King Lear* it is almost everywhere and pervades the play like a second atmosphere and breathes forth its peculiar flavour with startling intensity at certain moments. But this extra meaning in *Lear*, this obscure philosophical undertone, is never an intrusion or a hindrance as it is in a way in *Hamlet*. Without taking away from the intense power of realistic portrayal of life, it invests these vivid scenes and figures of life with an added dimension, with a dimly perceived halo of a deeper meaning. All the significant contraries of vision that we find in the alternation of the pure tragedies with the darkly symbolical plays of the period reach an amazing co-ordination in *King Lear*. Character as vivid meaningful individuality mingles variously with the conception of character either as the static symbol of some one-sided inclination (as in *Troilus & Cressida*) or as violently changing

from one extreme to another (as in *Measure for Measure* and *Timon*). Events naturally evolving from the dramatic situation mingle with or merge into events apparently prearranged with a purpose deeper and more nebulous than the author finds it possible to express through strictly dramatic situations. The cherished values of life that have by implication dominated Shakespeare's vision so long mingle with a note of cynical and misogynic disillusionment originating in *Hamlet* and ominously expanding in the Problem Plays and in *Timon*. And — what is perhaps most significant — character, which becomes in this play an unprecedented blend of naturalistic and symbolical elements, has to contend for the first time with a new force which has been almost equally absent from the pure tragedies and the Problem Plays : namely, Fate or Providence or an unknown and unknowable power which has designed this baffling drama of life and carries it on in an equally baffling manner. Character, thus, itself a mysterious entity at which Shakespeare never ceased wondering, comes in a way to mingle with Fate, an even more inscrutable agent, to form a dual determining force in life, with the tremulous balance significantly tilting towards the latter with the intensification of the note of questioning towards the end. Looking back, we realize that this constitutes a massive resurgence of that strain of brooding fatalism which had so mysteriously appeared in the last act of *Hamlet* and which had lain almost completely buried since then in the long sequence of plays — *Troilus*, *All's Well*, *Othello*, *Measure* and *Timon* — which connect that dual-toned tragedy with *King Lear*. And, finally, an intolerable awareness of evil mingles with a profound sense of acceptance — also a resurgence of the momentary tone of resignation appearing in the last-act broodings of Hamlet. *King Lear* is a blend of opposites, a profound fusion of contraries ; perhaps the most marvellous coalescence of warring visions in Western literature, surpassing in this respect even the excruciating clash of feelings and ideas in the *Medea* of Euripides.

I shall try to show in the remaining sections of this chapter how the elements of the two contrasted visions we have studied coalesce into various significant formations in the plot and in the characterization of *King Lear*, and how in the resultant products we get the first glimpses of an entirely novel attitude to life and a novel mode

of portrayal which develops in dim, tortuous courses through the last tragedies and reach their final culmination in the tragi-comic dream-world of the Romances.

III. ARRAY OF LIVING CONTRASTS

King Lear, the greatest of the tragedies, is in many ways the first distant herald of the Romances ; chiefly perhaps in its emphatic inauguration of a world of deep and sharp and, occasionally, violent contrasts. We have traced the beginning of the deeply contrasted shades : in static forms in *Troilus & Cressida* and in fast-changing shapes in *Measure for Measure* and *Timon of Athens*. But the contrasts in *Lear* show two great points of difference. *King Lear presents in its single world both the static and the dynamic forms of these contrasts*. Secondly, whereas in the two Problem Plays and in *Timon* the contrasts (in either of the two forms) have generally impoverished the psychological portrayal, in *Kng Lear* they have blended with perfect felicity with a vivid and flawless psychological vision.

Let us take the characters first. Right from the beginning the play is a study in contrasts. Regan and Goneril versus Cordelia : the two absolutely bad daughters pitted against the one absolutely good. What a marvellously drawn contrast and how persistently it has been pursued throughout the play. How alike Goneril's and Regan's hypocritical addresses to their father are, and how Cordelia mortally shrinks from the flattery which so glibly flows from the lips of her sisters :

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart in my mouth.

They have made their faces 'vizards to their hearts' whereas she is unable to 'mend her speech' even 'a little'. What is obviously their inner nature is so foreign an element to her that even the fear of absolute ruin cannot induce her to make use of it. Then later on, though Goneril and Regan remain subtly distinguished individuals, they increasingly become the twin symbolic forms of an all-round viciousness, and have a reinforcing effect on one another. When Lear leaves Goneril's house in a rage and proposes to go to Regan who, he believes, will prove 'kind and comfortable', the Fool prophesies that

She will taste as like this as a crab does to a crab.

—deepening the suggestion that they are made of the same stuff. In fact, despite the magic of Shakespearian individualization, they are throughout treated symbolically as one. Lear in Act I Scene iv identifies Goneril with Ingratitude, the marble-hearted fiend, and compares her with the parent-slaying sea-monster, with the serpent and the wolf ; *but these are equally applicable to Regan*. They design together the two most monstrously inhuman actions in the play : the turning out of old Lear into the stormy night and the mortification of old Gloucester :

Regan : Hang him instantly

Goneril : Pluck out his eyes.

Lear brands them together as ‘unnatural hags’, ‘she-foxes’ and monsters, and Albany characterizes them together as ‘tigers, not daughters’, ‘most barbarous, most degenerate’ and as ‘monsters of the deep’. And Gloucester apprehends their joint participation in the horrid act of mortifying and murdering their white-haired father :

Because I would not see thy cruel nails

Pluck out his poor eyes, nor thy fierce sister

In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs.

While Goneril and Regan are thus grouped together as embodiments of the utmost horror of evil in female form and of extreme unfilial cruelty, Cordelia is made to reappear as the angel of selfless, all-sacrificing love and of absolute filial devotion. While Lear repeatedly refers to his two elder daughters as monsters and fiends, he believes Cordelia, on waking up from his trance, to be ‘a soul in bliss’. Regan and Goneril are ministers of torture and madness ; Cordelia is the minister of sweetness and light shedding the celestial radiance of love on the troubled spirit of Lear and restoring it to harmony. Just as in the earlier scenes she had represented *Truth* against the *Falsehood* of Goneril and Regan, so in the later scenes she stands for absolute *Love* and *Tenderness* against their absolute *Cruelty* and *Hard-heartedness*. It is like one snow-white angel pitted against two coal-black devils ; it is like the absolute contrast between the deformed devils singed by rose-petals and the slender, radiant angels in the last scene of *Faust*.

A similar absolute contrast is presented by the figures of Edgar and Edmund — the one *absolutely good* and the other almost *absolutely evil*. Edmund conspires against his saintly brother, deceives his father into disinheriting him and has him hunted out of the house, informs Cornwall of his father's design to save the life of the old king, quietly acquiesces in Cornwall's putting out his father's eyes, feigns love for both Goneril and Regan with the purpose of capturing the whole kingdom, and orders the slaughter of the captive Lear and Cordelia — though, finding all lost, he tries with his last breath to undo some of the evil he has done. Edgar, on the other hand, loves his devilish half-brother so well that he becomes his unsuspecting victim until it is too late. Hunted about like a wild beast and taking the guise of the lowliest beggar to save his life, he is still calm and without a drop of malice in his heart. His presence has a peculiarly soothing influence on the maddened Lear, and his heart is about to break at the sight of his blinded father who had sought his life and whom he now leads by the hand and saves from the sword of his hired executioner and whom he finally redeems from the clutches of an overwhelming despair. Later, when the opportunity comes, he challenges and slays the vicious Edmund, and it is his moving narration of the manner of his father's death and of Kent's matchless fidelity that inspires the dying Edmund to his last and only act of goodness. Besides representing goodness and evil, humanity and inhumanity, as Cordelia on the one hand and Regan and Goneril on the other do, Edgar and Edmund also represent the extremes of blind, beastly selfishness and a generous philanthropic breadth of soul.

These are the two main sets of character-contrasts that dominate the play. But there are a few others, pitched in a lower key. The King of France and the Duke of Burgundy react to the unexpected disinheriting of Cordelia in entirely different ways. When Lear presents her to her sisters as

Unfriended, new-adopted to our hate,
Dowered with our curse and stranger'd with our oath,

how absolutely different are the reactions of the two princes! Burgundy, a greedy materialist, cared little for love and had his eye all the time on Cordelia's immense fortune, and so instantly

withdraws as soon as he finds she has none. But France has already come to love and admire Cordelia as a woman, and even the most drastic change in her fortunes cannot alter his feelings. In fact (in total contrast to Burgundy's mental process) it is her being disinherited for being truthful that deepens his attachment to her. His address to Burgundy, in its mingling of love for the adored and generosity towards a rival, speaks of a lofty temper of soul :

My lord of Burgundy,
What say you to the lady ? Love's not love
When it is mingled with regards that stands
Alooft from the entire point. Will you have her ?
She is herself a dowry.

and his beautiful address to Cordelia :

Fairest Cordelia, thou art most rich being poor,
Most choice forsaken, and most loved despised

and his touching realization :

Gods, gods : 'tis strange that from their cold'st neglect
My love should kindle to inflamed respect

at once tell of a loftily idealistic and warmly romantic disposition which creates a sharp contrast with the cold, calculating materialism of Burgundy.

This deep contrasting of character-shades extends itself even to the menial world. Think of the basely faithful Oswald, so eloquently denounced by Kent, co-operating without a twinge of conscience in furthering the wicked designs of his mistress and her friends ; think of his vicious glee at the sight of the blinded Gloucester whom he jumps to kill off for the promised reward ; and then think of that servant of Cornwall's, that very image of outraged conscience, who does not hesitate to raise his sword against his almighty master to prevent the blinding of old Gloucester, and lays down his life in a purely humanitarian cause. Here again, the contrast is not only sharp but absolute.

These qualitative and symbolic contrasts of character-shades hark back to the humour-like static character-casts of Ajax, Achilles,

Helen, Troilus and Cressida, those immovable one-essence figures who could never change. The figures of Regan, Goneril, Cordelia, France, Burgundy, Edgar and Edmund are also changeless in their basic consistency of behaviour ; they have more or less single or at least simple inclinations, but they are not either static or wooden in their movements. The interpenetration of the two visions has invested them, in spite of their composition, with the true psychological rhythm of life. Secondly, in *Troilus & Cressida* these passion-symbolizing characters form a clumsy and bizarre pattern whereas in *King Lear* they are gathered up into groups or pairs presenting sharp and significant contrasts. We shall discuss the ultimate significance of their presence in the total development of Shakespeare's outlook towards the end of the chapter.

IV. VIOLENT TRANSFORMATIONS VIVIFIED

The characters of Regan, Goneril and Cordelia, of Edgar and Edmund, of France and Burgundy, of Oswald and Cornwall's martyred servant and of the Earl of Kent, thus suggest an insidious process of departure from the great Shakespearian habit of portraying subtly mixed individual psychologies, and a tendency towards visualizing quality-dominated characters of a simpler composition. We now trace in *King Lear* that other mode of departure from the integrity of characterization that we first notice in *Measure for Measure*, the tendency to look at character, at human nature, as something capable of being violently transformed by unsuspected impulses roused by the impact of unforeseen circumstance.

We find in *King Lear* two central characters who change violently and without sufficient reason from one extreme to another, tracing a significant line of development from Angelo, Isabella and Timon, and pointing towards the distant figures of Posthumus, Cymbeline, Leontes and their kindreds. They are Lear himself and the Earl of Gloucester. The suddenness with which Lear's feelings towards Cordelia, his best beloved child, change into one of violent hatred has been commented upon by numerous critics, most emphatically perhaps by Tolstoy who pronounced it to be 'unnatural' and 'arbitrary'. Tolstoy's chronic aversion to Shakespeare is well known ; nevertheless the suddenness and the violence of the

transformation is beyond doubt. She whom one moment ago Lear had with the tenderest affection called his 'joy' and who, the astonished King of France points out, was

even now you best object,
The argument of your praise, balm of your age,
The best, the dearest

had 'in this trice of time' become 'new-adopted' to his 'hate', 'dowered' with his 'curse' and 'strangered' with his 'oath', and towards whom he disclaims

all my paternal care,
Propinquity, and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
hold thee from this for ever.

and whom he dismisses with the cruel words :

Hence, and avoid my sight :

In a moment, thus, Lear's fond love turns into extreme hatred and his deep tenderness into terrible cruelty. Note also how his sudden displeasure also sweeps up in its course the Earl of Kent, another person to whom even one moment ago he had been deeply attached. In some way or other his nature has been shaken up even more violently than Angelo's had been ; he is in the grip of an overwhelming passion with which he practically becomes one for the time. He has become a 'dragon' (I. i. 121). Kent describes him as 'mad' (I. i. 145) and in the grip of a 'hideous rashness' (I. i. 150) which makes him take the disastrous course of killing his physician and bestowing his fee on the foul disease (I. i. 162-3).

Let us now take a look at the other example of 'hideous rashness' before making more comprehensive comments. The sudden reversal of old Gloucester's feelings towards Edgar is no less sharp and violent than the change of Lear's attitude towards Cordelia. It is true that there is a powerful external cause behind this change and that Edmund's machinations almost match Iago's in their deadly ingenuity. But we have also to reckon with the facts that, besides suffering from the handicap of illegitimacy, Edmund, who has been absent for nine years, must have been quite an unknown

character to his father, while the virtuous Edgar must have been his father's constant companion all through. And yet Gloucester instantly loses all his faith and all his judgment under the sudden shock of the evidence faked by the nearly unknown Edmund and, implicitly believing his story without stopping for a moment to check it, assumes a mortally vengeful attitude towards his saintly son for whom even a few moments ago he had harboured the warmest affection. The situations in the first and in the second scene are, thus, generally similar, though not entirely alike ; but the resultant passions of Lear and Gloucester are not only very similar but quite identical in quality. They make the same grievous mistakes ; both mistake the good for the bad and the bad for the good, truth for falsehood and falsehood for truth, faith for treachery and treachery for faith. They show that Angelo and Isabella and Timon were not just casual configurations of a passing mood of cynicism, that they were the first signs of a new way of looking at character and at human nature that was developing in the backstage of Shakespeare's mind. The characters of Lear and Gloucester betray an Angelo- and Timon-like fluidity, a fateful tendency to be transformed by the impact of circumstance into something quite unlike themselves, and it is all the more significant that this demonstration of the extreme instability of character occurs in the midst of an intensely realized tragic situation. We have noticed in the characters belonging to the sharply contrasted groups a persistence of more or less unmixed one-sided inclinations. We notice in Lear and Gloucester, on the other hand, the violently changeful possibilities in human nature. These two departures from the fine relativistic realism of Shakespeare's character-portrayal had appeared *separately* in *Troilus & Cressida* and *Measure for Measure* : in *King Lear* the two modes of deviation appear together.

What is more, *one character in this play—Edgar—represents a remarkable blend of the one-essence type and the sudden-transformation type*. Surely the dramatist wished to build up Edgar as the image of the ideal man visualized by the troubled soul of Hamlet :

for thou hast been
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,
A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
Hath ta'en with equal thanks : and blessed are those

Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled
 That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
 To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
 That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
 In my heart's core, ay in my heart of heart,
 As I do thee.

(*Ham.* III. ii)

This idealized image of Horatio is precisely what Edgar actually is : one in whose thought Hamlet's fifth-act philosophy of 'The readiness is all' (*Ham.* V. i) deepens into 'Ripeness is all' (*Lear* V. ii.). But the plot would not have allowed Shakespeare to make him appear in that image from the beginning. For the manner of Edgar's sudden plunge into misfortune presupposes a naively credulous psychology, a complete ignorance of the devious tangles of life. Such characters are by no means impossible. What is impossible is that they should turn overnight into profound all-enduring philosophers-cum-men of action. There are two psychological improbabilities associated with Edgar. One is his sudden transformation into a blend of a passionless philosopher and an adroit man of action. The other is that he does not—at any stage—express the least animus against either his villain brother or his unpardonably rash father. If he had felt such emotions and overcome them, it would have been all right psychologically. But the point is that, while another person in his position would have been burning with wrath and indignation, *he does not have such feelings at all*. While Lear and Gloucester show a wonderful process of transformation, Edgar seems to pass at a single step from his naive to his profoundly philosophical-cum-practical self.

The result of all this is that *characterization in this play presents an indefinitely new quality* — something unprecedented in Shakespeare. Without losing their intense lifelikeness the characters take on extra tints of abstract qualities ; without losing their sharp individuality they become more than individuals ; their naturalistic images radiate symbolic aura ; their rich central umbras shade off into tenuous penumbral regions.

V. THE PLOT : A STRING OF VICISSITUDES

These 'static' and 'hyperdynamic' departures from the realistic integrity of Shakespeare's character-portrayal appear to be deeply

linked with a corresponding deviation from the integrity of his plot-construction — both suggesting a decline of the causalational view of things. From now on a new feature comes to dominate the pattern of events in Shakespearian drama: sharp and violent changes of fortune, marking yet another powerful intrusion of the disintegrating vision on the ordered realism of his dramatic world. And this new feature too had appeared for the first time in the Problem Plays, chiefly in *Measure for Measure*, and *Timon*. To understand and distinguish the peculiarities of the new disintegrating influence, whenever confusion arises, we have always to resort to comparison with the plays embodying the great vision of balanced realism, the most perfect of them being *Othello*. Doubtless fortunes change profoundly in *Othello* too, as they must in tragedies; but the changes do not come in a rush. They appear slowly, gradually, in a minutely lifelike rhythm and along the steps of a perfect causal crescendo. But look at the first violations of this causal rhythm of events in *Measure for Measure*. Claudio and Juliet were one moment wrapped in bliss; the next moment Claudio finds himself in a condemned cell, and Juliet is plunged in extreme sorrow and disgrace. Isabella, who has voluntarily renounced worldly life and who on the first day of her novitiate insists on further restrictions on the miserably limited freedom of the nuns, and whom even the dissolute Lucio holds

as a thing ensky'd and sainted ;
By your renouncement an immortal spirit

readily agrees to the plan of bedmate substitution and ends up as the Duke's wife. The disconsolate Mariana happily regains her beloved. From the peak of power and fame Angelo is first thrown into the pit of humiliation and ordered to be executed, and then is equally suddenly pardoned and united with a matchlessly loving bride.

This element too develops significantly in *King Lear* and colours the powerful realism of the play. *King Lear* may in a way be summed up as a tale of the most stirring vicissitudes, a string of peripeteia from start to finish. Think of what happens to Cordelia in the first scene; what a fearful reversal of fortune in an instant! From being her almighty father's best beloved and the universally

adored princess of the realm she becomes in a moment a hated and beggared outcast whom only the presence of an exceptionally noble suitor saves from abject misery. And think now of that other fluctuation of her fortunes in the last act. The powerful queen of France is in the twinkling of an eye clapped in prison and hanged like a common criminal.

The shift in Edgar's fortunes is no less sudden and violent. The beloved son of the powerful earl and his successor, he is in a moment branded as an appalling traitor and an intending parricide. From complete happiness and security he is suddenly plunged into utmost destitution and the most deadly peril, to escape which the soft-lived earl's son has to bring himself down to the state of a squalid mad beggar in whom Lear and Gloucester see the limit of human lowliness.

Think now of the fortunes of Lear and Gloucester. The despotic ruler of the realm dealing out life and death with his smiles and frowns, finds himself in the space of a few days thrown out of both his daughters' houses and, like another beggared outcast, passes that night of elemental terror in the rain-swept, storm-battered plain, finding shelter at last in a beggar's hovel. From a position of prosperous security Gloucester is suddenly tossed into the abyss — kicked out of his own house into the wild night with both his eyes mangled. Then again, at the end, the sudden revelation of his companion's identity not only redeems his despair but floods his heart with a mortal rush of joy even stronger than his late affliction.

So many of the major characters in *King Lear* are thus tossed on a wild and violent sea, and when we add to this impression of the uncertain and unpredictable nature of what can happen to man that other impression of character not being its own master through being either excessively dominated by certain fixed traits, or by its tendency to be violently transformed by the impact of unsuspected impulses, we have the irresistible feeling of a dwindling of human responsibility, of free will melting away into a mere shadow of itself, of man's freedom of thought and action being restrained from both within and without. And with free will growing nebulous, fatalistic speculations arise and cast their deepening shadows all over the scene.

VI. THE AWFUL SHADOW OF AN UNSEEN POWER

Something like this, a certain dwindling of the responsibility habitually attributed to Shakespearian characters had already made their appearance in the Problem Plays. But there the situations are different. The responsibility for what happens in *Troilus* and *Measure for Measure* is largely taken away from character ; but it is not attributed to any other agent, so that where the central motive force of the drama was expected to be, there is a virtual blank. In *King Lear* this vague central blank of the Problem Plays has been filled in with an unequal mixture of two elements. Character appears to be the potent and principal motive force at the beginning ; but, gradually gaining upon it and smothering it into submission, rises the ever-deepening shadow of a new awesome power variously designated as 'fortune', 'fate', 'stars', 'Gods', 'Justicers' and other similar names. *King Lear* is the first play in the Shakespearian sequence in which there is a decided swing towards a fatalism which develops variously through the later tragedies and the Romances, finally landing the poet in an attitude which can have but few parallels in literary history.

We shall now try to trace the development of this swing towards a vague awareness of a mysterious designing power through the successive stages of the play.

Till about the middle of the second act the operations of this inscrutable power are hardly perceptible. Yet there is a feeling of some new element being present in the atmosphere. The extreme wickedness of Goneril and Regan and the extreme rectitude of Cordelia, the extreme contrast between Edgar and Edmund, the similar awful blunders committed by Lear and Gloucester and such other events and suggestions, which might well have strained our sense of reality but for the tremendously vivifying imagination at work, cannot fail to suggest that the dramatist, by this slightly unnatural rearrangement of life's material, is preparing the ground for presenting us with a vision of life very different from what he gave us in *Hamlet* or in *Othello*, a vision in which human purpose and resolution are not likely to count for much. But then, from the second scene of the second act of the play, so far dominated by 'characteristic' actions, this new feeling about a mysterious ultra-

human power starts making its insidious appearance. In Act II Sc. ii the undercurrent breaks surface only once. The disguised Kent, sitting in the stocks, the 'shameful lodging' into which he has been put by Cornwall, and carrying the secret message from Cordelia in the folds of his garments, feels most unexpectedly disposed — after his hysterical denunciation of Oswald — to look at the whole situation as the handiwork of a mysterious Providence and fervently prays :

Fortune, good night ; smile once more ; turn thy wheel !

— a prayer which in the effusion of its dramatically unoccasional fatalism points to a new feeling about life in the mind of the dramatist.

Then from Act II Sc. iv we find this fatalistic note reappearing in a persistent manner in the form of a tendency to refer all the strange tangles and vicissitudes of life to 'the gods', 'the stars', or 'the justicers'. From now on this becomes a regular feature of the philosophical tone of the play, marking a great departure from the tones of both the earlier tragedies and the Problem Plays. This note makes itself felt with great power in this scene (II. iv.) in the two utterances of the outraged Lear overwhelmed at once by mental agony and the tyranny of the elements :

O Heavens,
If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow obedience, if yourselves are old,
Make it your cause ; send down and take my part ;

* * * *

You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
As full of grief as age ; wretched in both.
If it be you that stirs these daughters' hearts
Against their father,

—deepening our participation in Kent's feeling that this painful knotting up of things is the work of a power beyond human control. Observe the note of persuasion in the apostrophe, as though Lear was trying to induce some stern and intractable agent to be kind and reasonable and which, he dimly suspects, is responsible for rousing the unnatural cruelty in the hearts of his daughters.

In Act III Scenes i and ii the suggestion of this power acquires a new dimension as its working is extended to the tumultuous operations of a wrathful nature. The white-haired king driven out by his own daughters into the wilderness of the raging night is described by the gentleman in Scene i as

Contending with the fretful elements ;
Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,
Or swell the curled waters above the main
That things might change or cease ; tears his white hair
Which the impetuous blasts with eyeless rage,
Catch in their fury, and making nothing of ;
Strives in his little world of man to out-scorn
The to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain

—a description which clearly holds up and is meant to hold up (as so many fine critics have observed) the picture of man as a helplessly raging victim in the hands of a merciless scheme of things of which the elemental fury becomes an instrument. The suggestion is developed with rapid and telling strokes in Scene ii. Lear calls upon the elements to hurl down on him their ‘horrible pleasure’. His description of himself as ‘A poor, infirm, weak and despis’d old man’ and his accusation of the elements :

But yet I call you servile ministers
That will with two pernicious daughters join
Your high-engender’d battles against a head
So old and white as this. Oh ! Oh ! 'tis foul !

have a ring of universal indictment. It is impossible to confine the significance of this elemental tyranny to the particular situation because Lear’s complaint rings in our ears as a cry rising from the soul of suffering humanity, somewhat akin to the wail that Sir Bedivere in Tennyson’s poem hears the three queen-sisters utter when they catch sight of the dying Arthur :

and from them rose
A cry that shiver’d to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

and because this suggestion of universal suffering at the hands of a remorseless fate is followed up and reinforced by countless others, becoming more and more explicit as the play progresses.

The next landmark in the development of this continually deepening suggestion is provided by Lear's profound comment in III. ii, made at a moment when he is on the point of regaining his sanity for the time :

I am a man
More sinn'd against than sinning.

Here is yet another utterance which becomes the central feeling produced by the situation and suggests the working of a power that has ordained things in an unaccountable way. The same suggestion breathes forth from the mystified questioning implied in Lear's words :

Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts ?

all expressing a new bewilderment felt by Shakespeare at Life's inextricably tangled phenomena as they appeared before him in that fast-changing social scene.

These profoundly fatalistic suggestions go on repeating themselves with wonderful variations. We come upon them at every turn of the way. Gloucester, as he feels the excruciating pain in his eye, exclaims :

O cruel ! O you gods !

which feeling is widened and deepened into the overwhelming generalization that issues from his lips a little later :

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods ;
They kill us for their sport.

and is followed by his reference to the beggared Edgar as

thou whom the heaven's plagues
Have humbled to all strokes.

Albany traces the hands of the 'justicers' in the strange retribution Cornwall meets at the hands of his servant while in the act of putt-

ing out Gloucester's eyes. The thought of the strange goodness of Cordelia set beside her sisters' equally strange viciousness inspires Kent to the fatalistic reflection :

It is the stars,
The stars above us, govern our conditions ;
Else one self mate and mate could not beget
Such different issues

This again becomes for the reader the very spirit of the situation and once more gives him the impression that it is the dramatist's feeling here that the bafflingly complex and contradictory phenomena of life are incapable of causalistic explanation, and can only be attributed to the inscrutable operations of an immanent will. Gloucester, as he prepares for suicide, addresses the 'mighty gods' with their 'great opposeless wills', yet again reinforcing the suggestion of an inexorable destiny, and later on his only prayer is :

You ever-gentle goods, take my breath from me.

Edgar describes himself as

A most poor man, made tame to fortune's blows.

Cordelia, watching over her sleeping insane father, implores the 'kind gods' to 'cure this great breach in his abused nature'. The disguised Edgar, parting from Albany after handing him Goneril's letter to Edmund, wishes him well in the one brief phrase : 'Fortune love you'.

And now the cruel contradictions of life emerge fully into action in the final overwhelming events of the play. On the eve of the great battle Edgar asks old Gloucester to pray 'that the right may thrive'. But the right does *not* thrive. The army that stood so selflessly for the right cause is beaten : Lear and Cordelia are taken prisoner and *Cordelia is hanged*. But look at the entirely different result of that other encounter between right and wrong. There the right *does* thrive : Edgar overcomes Edmund. And when we remember that *the defeat and the hanging of Cordelia were purposeful innovations of Shakespeare's mind*—the point at which he altered the events of the old play most drastically - can we doubt that Shakespeare was intending to communicate to us his new vision

of the 'strange mutations', the terrible contradictions, featuring the dispensations of an inscrutable Providence which cannot be explained by any rational or moral laws ?

VII. THE UNANSWERED QUESTION

This impression persists and finally rises to a summit of unsurpassable power. Immediately after their capture Cordelia, consoling Lear, expresses an almost Hardyan view of the fate that has overtaken them :

We are not the first
Who with best meaning have incur'd the worst.

and refers to 'false Fortune's frown' which has cast them down. And we are to keep in mind that it is Cordelia, the living image of love and truth, who says this. Lear speaks of the 'mystery of things'. Anyone who wishes to part father and daughter must 'bring a brand from heaven'. Albany speaks of the 'judgment of the heavens that makes us tremble', while the very essence of Shakespere's pained bewilderment is put in Lear's last poignant question :

And my poor fool is hanged ! No, no, no life !
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
And thou no breath at all ?

To this terrible question Shakespeare know no answer.

A confused impression of a dark fatality ruling man's life, thus, runs in a steady climactic course through *King Lear*, and it is all the more remarkable that this sense persists and deepens in spite of the rich and powerful characterization. But this powerful characterization is an instrument that cuts both ways. The extreme qualities and propensities represented by most of the characters, their significant groupings, the sharp contrasts between them, the unchangeably one-sided inclinations dominating some of them and the violent changeability characteristic of some others, turn the whole situation into a complex interplay of opposites prompting profound fatalistic speculations. From *how* things happen the emphasis has come to be

shifted to *why* things happen like this. The great Shakespearian *how*, almost scientific in its objectivity, is still very much there, almost at the peak of its power ; but it is not an independent *how* any more ; it is conditioned by the pressure of an intensely powerful *why* which has reached its extreme climax in this play. The objectivity is peculiarly coloured by the new subjective vision—a development from the disintegrating vision of the Problem Plays—and the highest realism shapes itself into a bunch of questions.

Philosophically speaking, *King Lear* is a great bunch of questions regarding the very central meaning of life, looming like the question-mark of the Great Bear in the crowded Shakespearian firmament. Why were Lear and Gloucester made so blindly egotistic, despite their basic good natures, and so pitifully gullible ? Why were they so vulnerable to the grossest illusions ? They never *meant* to be cruel and unjust ; why when did they become so ? How is it that men of such strangely different natures as France and Burgundy are made ? How is it that the same parents had two devils and one angel for daughters ? Why was it that Cordelia and Edgar, two of the noblest human beings imaginable, had to suffer so much, one of them hanged by the order of her own sister ? How is it possible for persons like Cordelia, Edgar, Kent and Cornwall's servant to be so wonderfully good and for others like Goneril, Regan Edmund, Cornwall and Oswald to be so horribly evil, and what could be the meaning of their being integral parts of one complex scheme of things ? Why do reward and punishment have no relation to merit ? Why do people have to suffer for being good ? And the last and greatest of the implied questions : What might be the nature of the power that has designed the world so strangely and runs it in this inscrutable manner ? There is no answer. Hamlet's last cryptic utterance, 'The rest is silence', expands itself into a colossal sense of mystery regarding the very motive force of life. Shakespeare ends his *Lear* not by answering any questions, not by elucidating life, but by holding up before us a dark, mesmerizing mystery that he found haunting the heart of life.

WILDE'S "ATHANASIA" : A STUDY IN AESTHETICISM

AMLAN J. MAJUMDAR

[‘Athanasia’ was first published in ‘Time’ in April, 1879 after Oscar Wilde had settled in London. The poem was revised and the last stanza omitted for ‘Poems’, the first collected edition of Wilde’s poems published by Bogue in 1881.]

‘ATHANASIA’ is a complex poem. Complex, because it speaks the ‘language of paradox’ and can reveal depths of which we are unaware at the first reading. The title itself is suggestive of the paradox round which the poem has been built. ‘Athanasia’ means deathlessness, a concept which would seem absurd in a world sharply limited by death. But the poem asserts the deathlessness of certain things, though everything in this world is subject to ‘Time’s Wasting Sovereignty’ ; things that have found a shelter in the ‘House of Art’. Art, then, is superior to life—a statement of the antithesis of art and life, the aesthetic doctrine. But the strength of the poem lies not so much in the idea it illustrates, but in the working of irony that converts the idea into a poem, a proof that Wilde can attain the heights of poetry. The paradox is twisted further : a little seed is found in the ‘wasted hollow’ of the hand of a mummy of a girl. Seed promises a new life but it comes from the most unexpected source—a dead body. The seed burgeons into life and sends forth blossoms, and so great is its charm that all other flowers—aspodel, lily, narcissus, jasmine and eucharis—are nothing compared to it ; the nightingale forgets her passions and the dove the ‘blossoming woods’. All this is due to the ‘strange arts’ this flower employs a hint (since elaborated) that it is not a real flower after all. The fact of the unreality of the flower is confirmed by the last two lines of the third stanza :

For not a thing of earth it seemed to be,
But stolen from heavenly Arcady.

Any doubt that it is sheer extravagance to call a flower unearthly, a doubt suggested by the ‘seemed’ of the first two lines quoted above, is dispelled by the adjunct to Arcady. Arcady which is

'heavenly'. Wilde is stressing the fact with a purpose and we become aware of the subtle irony that the poem employs as a means of expression.

This flower of Egypt is a special flower—it is the symbol of the Beauty of Art that is not to be found in Nature represented by the common English flowers, as Egypt itself is a symbol of something that has withstood the ravages of time. Egypt here functions in the same way as Byzantium does in Yeats's poetry. It is to be viewed as the store-house of the great things (Art/Beauty) of which this flower is the symbol—in other words, as the 'House of Art'. That the brown-bee, the dragon-fly, the nightingale and the dove flock to this flower ignoring the familiar flowers means that seekers of Beauty are apt to value Art over Nature nay, even over Life, as suggested by the reference to the Nightingale forgetting her passions.

Now the poem goes on to explain the statement, to justify it poetically, and converts the aesthetic antithesis of Art and Life into image. The paradox of deathlessness is resolved in the last three stanzas.

This flower is deathless (to it a thousand years seem 'but the lingering of a summer's day') because :

It never knew the tide of canker fears
Which turn a boy's gold hair to withered grey,
The dread desire of death it never knew,
Or how all folk that were born must rue.

—it is removed from life.

The lines come as a reminder that for the aesthetes the point of reference is always Keats, though they never seem to perceive like him, the relation of the firmness of art to the firm grasp on the outer world. But these lines echo Keats in none too different phrasing :

What thou amongst the leaves hast never known
The weariness, the fever, and fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan ;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale and spectre-thin, and dies ;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs.

(To Nightingale)

The immortality of the Nightingale of Keats is due to its distance from the bitter realities of life, and Keats also has known the dread desire for death—".....for many a time/I have been half in love with easeful death." (To Nightingale). Yet there is a difference : Keats must come back to the realities of life as the Nightingale's anthem fades for away and dissolves ; for him there is no escape in death. He accepts as a matter of fact the 'clamorous care' that Wilde wants to escape either in the world symbolised by the flower—'It never feels decay but gathers life/From the sunlight and the supreme air', or in death,

As some sad river wearied of its flow
Through the dull plains, the haunts of common men,
Leaps lover-like into the terrible sea :
And counts it gain to die so gloriously.

It is in place here to quote Dr. Leavis : 'Keats' aestheticism, in short, does not mean any such cutting off of the special valued order of experience from direct vulgar living.....as is implied in the aesthetic anti-thesis of art and life.' But inspite of this difference the similarity with Keats is significant. The poem under review catches some essential aspects of the aestheticism of Keats. We quote again from Dr. Leavis : 'Nevertheless, a certain drawing of frontiers, a wilful delimitation of the "true" or "real" in experience, a focussing of the vision so as to shut out the uncongenial, is essentially the purpose of Keats' worship of Beauty.' The purpose, may it be noted, also of Wilde. Like the 'Grecian Urn', 'Athanasia' insists the Art attains eternity because it is removed from life. 'It (the flower) is the child of eternity' because it has no 'strange dream' or 'evil memory'. —It disdains 'human passion'. Which, in the words of Keats, 'leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed,/ A burning forehead, and parching tongue.' (Grecian Urn).

But the escape that the poem indicates has other points of reference also. Arnold's Empedocles counted it 'gain to die' and jumped into Mt. Etna. Add the kinship with Arnold is unmistakable in the opening lines of the last stanza :

We mar our lordly strength in barren strife
With the world's legions led by clamorous care.



'Barren strife' and 'clamorous care' are the burden of Arnold also. Thus Wilde and Arnold find themselves at one. The aesthete and the austere moralist face the same evils, and both, so far as their poems are concerned, find escape necessary though they seek different grounds.

The significance of the poem however, does not lie in its escape clauses ; escape is only a side-issue. The focus of attention is on the deathlessness of certain things and there is no suggestion if man can also be deathless and be at one with the art object in its athanasy. Wilde is being deliberately non-moral, deliberately aesthetic. There is no desire on his part, express or implicit, to attain that significance through art which his compatriot will show at a later date :

"..... and gather me
Into the artifices of eternity.
Once out of nature I will never take
My bodily form from any natural thing.
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake ;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come."

(Sailing to Byzantium—W. B. Yeats).

COURT, CITY AND COUNTRY : SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THEMES IN PHILIP MASSINGER

SWAPAN CHAKRAVORTY

I

Writing about English society in 1565, Sir Thomas Smith, in *De Republica Anglorum*, divides it into four 'degrees': gentlemen, citizens or burgesses, yeomen and labourers. The term 'gentlemen' included an upper tier, a *nobilitas major* consisting of the peerage, and a lower tier, a *nobilitas minor* made up of knights, esquires and gentlemen *simpliciter*. This twofold *nobilitas* reappears in a similar classification by Thomas Wilson in *The State of England* published in 1600.¹

Notable in these Tudor analyses of English society is the absence of any sharp distinction between the peerage and gentry. The gentry definitely did not rank with the peers: peerage carried distinct legal privileges such as the right to be summoned by individual writ to sit in the House of Lords. But the gentry were part of the aristocratic order the peerage led; they were looked upon as constituting one 'degree' as far as their social interests and obligations were concerned.² Non-economic considerations like ancestry and titles of honour defined the status of a peer, but as an economic 'class' the peerage had no distinct identity. "Economically", writes J. H. Hexter, rejecting Tawney's equation of the lay peerage with a declining aristocracy and the gentry with a rising rural middle-class, "gentry and peerage were of the same class—the class that ordinarily drew the larger part of its income from the exploitation of proprietary rights on land."³

Compared to the clarity of these analyses, the taxonomical ramifications we come across in histories of the Stuart and revolutionary eras seem bewildering. We hear of the declining nobility, nobility with

and without mercantile investments, the upper and lower gentry, the 'mere' gentry and gentry with mercantile interests, the rising and the declining gentry, Royalist and Parliamentary gentry, merchants with powerful court connections and merchants radically opposed to the court. The multiplication of terms denoting social and political groups indicate an enlarging conflict within the English upper order : the concurrence of interests and responsibilities of the two tiers envisaged by Tudor writers is threatened with dissolution.

The Englishmen of the early seventeenth century, however, used the simpler labels Court, City and Country to indicate social alignments. While the City formed a distinct social group in classifications such as those of Smith or Wilson, the twofold *nobilitas* implied that Court and Country were partners in the responsibilities of the kingdom. Court and Country were often contrasted, but these were topographical correlatives of art and nature, extravagance and simplicity, ambition and content. The Court was supposed to be the nursery of chivalric virtues :

Of Court it seems, men Courtesie doe call,
For that it there most useth to abound ;
And well besemeth that in Princes hall
That vertue should be plentifully found,
Which of all goodly manners is the ground,
And roote of civil conversation.⁴

Thus begins the first canto of the sixth book of the *Faerie Queene*, containing the legend of Sir Calidore or Courtesie. And yet Calidore has to go into a pastoral truancy in the idyllic retreat of Pastorella

And set his rest amongst the rusticke sort,
Rather then hunt still after shadowes vaine
Of courtly favour, fed with light report
Of every blaste,.....

(VI. x, 2)⁵

Here, of course, the pastoral landscape is an idealized backdrop for the theme of virtue, or true 'courtesy', as distinct from courtly 'policy'.

This idealized rural dream is given an actual location in the

English country-house in such seventeenth century poems as Ben Jonson's *Penshurst* and Carew's *To Saxham*. This neo-pastoral idealization of the life of a country gentleman is best observed in Ben Jonson's *To Sir Robert Wroth*:

How blest art thou, canst love the countrey, Wroth,
Whether by choice, or fate, or both ;
And, though so neere the citie, and the court,
Art tane with neither's vice, nor sport.⁶

Whether this new location of the pastoral vision in the Tudor country-house is "in the direction and in the interest of a new kind of society : that of a developing agrarian capitalism", as Raymond Williams argues,⁷ is a question that does not concern this discussion in an immediate way. But one should note that the 'internal transformation' of this artificial mode observed by Williams coincides with a progressive sharpening of the political definition of the terms Court and Country. In Book VI of the *Faerie Queene*, in spite of Meliboee's praise of the contentment bred by the pastoral retreat, we are aware that it is Calidore, who will succeed in rescuing Pastorella from the brigands, for "the first and true profession of the courtier must be that of arms".⁸ In spite of the need for finding the true home of virtue in the mind and for shunning courtly opportunism, courtesy is ultimately the product of the partnership of Court and Country, of the court of Gloriana and the country of Pastorella. Meliboee had spoken of the sovereignty of the mind in a manner that looks forward to Marvell and Milton :

It is the mynd, that maketh good or ill,
That maketh wretch or happie, rich or poore :
For some, that hath abundance at his will,
Hath not enough, but wants in general store ;
And other that hath little, askes no more,
But in that little is both rich and wise.

(VI. ix, 30)⁹

But in spite of this unmistakable emphasis on the sovereignty of the mind, the Faery court remains the "sacred nursery/Of virtue". It is only that later courts have failed to live up to their obligations. But with the transfer of the pastoral dream to the English country-house, we note a specific denial of the Court as the nursery of noble virtues.

When Ben Jonson is extolling Sir Kenelm Digby as the epitome of courtly virtues

he doth excel
In honour, courtesy, and all the parts
Court can call hers, or man could call his arts.

he is careful to locate the court that breeds such virtues in the 'imperial room' of Digby's mind :

He's prudent, valiant, just, and temperate ;
In him all virtue is beheld in state :
And he is built iike some imperial room
For that to dwell in, and be still at home.¹⁰

In Herrick's poem on the same theme (of contentment in the Country) addressed to his brother, the disjunction of Court and virtue is made more explicit :

And when thou hear'st by that too-true-Report,
Vice rules the Most, or All at Court :
Thy pious wishes are, (though thou not there)
Vertue had, and mov'd her sphere.¹¹

This attempt to extricate virtue from its traditional location in the Court, and to transfer it to the sovereign sphere of the mind, with the country and the country-house as its particular topographical correlative, is symptomatic of the widening hiatus within the two-fold *nobilitas* in English society. In the third and fourth decades of the century of revolution in particular the terms Court and Country acquire connotations of conflict and indicate the ideological equations on either side of the political battlelines. By the time of the outbreak of the Great Rebellion the terms become labels for the Royalists and Parliamentarians.

This is not to say that we can easily demarcate the Court and the Country by a neat horizontal bisection of the two-tiered *nobilitas*. The extremely heterogeneous composition of the warring parties ("There were members of all classes on both sides," says Christopher Hill)¹² and the enhanced social mobility of the period rule out any such simple scheme. Nor is it advisable for a discussion of this nature to lose its way in the storm over the gentry debate. Court

and Country, we only need observe, fall increasing apart as the upper order of English society is rent asunder by economic and political conflicts.

The focus of attention here is the way in which these conflicts and changing connotations are absorbed and formalized in the literature of the period. The principal temptation to resist is that of reading literature as social chronicle or a half-baked history of ideas. One needs to take into account the formal and expressive changes in the presentation of traditional notions in literature, and then relate significant changes to pressures to which the artist may have been responding. Much of the invective against decaying hospitality, against city usurers and court gallants, against violation of 'degree' and against the presumption of citizens' wives in Jacobean literature, for instance, is pretty traditional, as Brian Gibbons has shown with reference to city comedy.¹³ And yet the uniformity of assumptions and of aesthetic impact point to formal compulsions that were peculiar to the period. When Ben Jonson asks the Digby youths Kenelm, John and George not to boast of the titles of their ancestors

Hang all your rooms with one large pedigree :
"Tis virtue alone is true nobility.¹⁴

he is expressing a perfectly familiar idea which can be traced back to Juvenal's *Satire VIII*, where the poet tells Ponticus

You may line your whole hall with waxen busts, but virtue,
And virtue alone, remains the one true nobility.¹⁵

And yet, while echoing Juvenal, Jonson is also responding to the ideological pressures of his time when titles were getting cheap and the concept of *noblesse oblige* was losing its substance. The sovereignty of the mind expounded by Moliboeo is *Faerie Queene*, VI. ix remains a central idea in the Puritan poets Marvell and Milton, and yet how different are the formal contexts—in them the withdrawal into the paradise within is presented as the final act of fortitude and the declaration of spiritual freedom for the heroic soul faced with the inevitability of tyranny and sin, amidst the shattered fragments of a millenarian dream.

To discern these pressures, therefore, one must look at the

process of absorption leading to formal changes in the presentation of ideas. Keeping such a critical principle in mind, this paper proposes to examine the plays of one Jacobean dramatist, Philip Massinger, and their shifting emphases in presenting Court, City and Country as idealized epicentres of value.

II

The Court is attacked with a savage consistency in *The Fatal Dowry*, an early play of Massinger in which he collaborated with Nathan Field (latest possible date 1620).¹⁶ Romont, who leads a long line of mercurial soldiers ranting against court corruption in Massinger's plays, says that to gain the favours of the parasites and brokers at the court of Burgundy

Our charest dames put off their modesties,
Soldiers forget their honors, usurers
Make sacrifice of Gold, poets of wit,
And men religious part with fame, and goodness !

(I. i, 96-99)

The rhetoric suggests a steady decay of values all round—modesty, honour, wit, fame and goodness equally contaminated by the upas-tree of court doctrine. The adulterous heroine of the play, Beaumelle, has a saucy companion, Bellapert, who redefines courtesy for our convenience :

When I say courtesie, doe not think I meane
A kisse, the tying of her shoo or garter,
And houre of private conference : those are trifles
In this word courtesie, we that are gamesters point at
The sport direct, where not alone the lover
Brings his Artillery, but uses it.

(III. i, 30-35)

The use of the martial metaphor to denote sexual meanings is a Renaissance commonplace,¹⁷ but here it acquires some significance in the context of the political theme. The hero Charalois, the son of the deceased commander of Burgundy, is condemned by the law

on account of his father's paltry debt with the city merchants, while money is being wantonly misspent at the court. The abuse of the martial metaphor indicates how the peace earned by the heroism of Charalois' father and soldiers like him breeds fops and sluts at the court with whom 'artillery' is debased to a ribald joke. Courtesy, in fact, becomes a pretext for cowardice. Liladam, a parasitical court-tout, refuses to retaliate even after being manhandled by Romont since it "would bruise/ A courtlike hand" to touch Romont's "knotted brow" (III. i, 330-33).

To this Massinger opposes an ideal of chivalry, which Leslie Stephen, writing of Massinger, had termed a "survival from a past epoch".¹⁸ But the ideal of honour, even when it is a 'survival', is not specifically associated with the Court by Massinger. When Romont, for instance, looks back at a 'past epoch'

Blest, blest be ever
The memory of that happy age, when justice
Had no guards to keepe off wronged innocence

(I. i, 67-99)

he is not referring to any particularly 'courtly' ideal. Instead of nurturing chivalric values, the Court is a positive enemy of the martial nobility since it shelters all varieties of undeserving squanderers. In this identification of the Court with a certain unchivalrous section of the nobility and its lackeys, there is an anticipation of the use of the word 'Court' as a more precise political term in the plays Massinger wrote during the rapidly polarising political environment of the next decade.

Ranged on the same side with the Court in this ideological equation stands the City. The son of one of the city creditors aims to be a soldier, and his father proposes to cure him of such unnatural longings by administering a physic compounded of the dead Marshall's bones. Novall Senior, a bigwig at court, agrees, and says that he would have tried the same prescription if his son had not had wit enough to be a fashionable and peaceful gentleman (I. ii, 122ff). Later in the same scene, when Charalois tries to nettle the creditors by calling them good men who pay what they owe, the 1st Creditor replies

'Tis the City doctrine
We stand bound to maintaine it.

(I. i, 195-196)

Charalois snaps back "Be constant in it", and proceeds to strip the veil off this doctrine which glories in prisoners' groans, widows' tears and cries of famished orphans (I. i, 203 ff).

The moral consanguinity of Court and City is best seen in two songs sung by Aymer in IV. ii to keep Charalois distracted while his wife Beaumelle entertains her paramour Novall Junior within. The first of these is the *Citizen's Song of the Courtier*.

Courtier, if thou needs wilt wive,
From this lesson learne to thrive.
If thou match a lady, that
Passes thee in birth and state,
Let her curious garments be
Twice above thine owne degree ;
This will draw great eyes upon her
Get her servants and thee honour.

The song over, the amorous laughter of the faithless Beaumelle is heard within. Contrary to the prudent advice of the song, Charalois feels his honour outraged. Then follows the *Courtier's Song to the Citizen* in which the courtier advises the citizen to wink at his wife's skittishness if it proves materially profitable.

Poore Citizen, if thou wilt be
A happy husband, learne of me
To set thy wife first in thy shop,
A faire wife, a kinde wife, a sweete wife sets a poore man up.
What though thy shelves be ne're so bare ;
A woman still is currant ware :
Each man will cheapen, foe, and friend
But whilst thou art at tother end,
What ere thou seest, or what dost heare,
Foole, have no eye to, nor an eare ;
And after supper for her sake,
When thou hast fed, snort, though thou wake :
What though the Gallant call thee mome ?
Yet with thy lanthorne light him home :
Then looke into the towne and tell,
If no such Tradesman there doe dwell,

Both songs put material advantage over honour and chastity, and bring out the spiritual kinship of Court and City. The Country, on the other hand, is conceived as fostering the twin virtues of simplicity and contentment, as in the Tudor pastorals or in later poems on the country-house. Novall Junior's page decides to quit Court and City, disgusted with his master's daily rig-out ritual attended by a tailor, a barber, and a perfumer :

...S' foote ile into the country againe, learne to speake truth, drinke Ale
and converse with my Father's Tenants ; here I heare nothing all day,
but upon my soule as I am a Gentleman and an honest man.

(IV. i, 12-17)

True, there is as yet no identification of the Country as a pastoral retreat with the Country as a political label for the anti-Court gentry or as an idealized refuge for the chivalric values represented by Charalois and Romont. We can actually observe the process of transformation by which the term Country is made to take on a political meaning denoting the interests of an anti-Court gentry, responsive to chivalric ideals and sensitive to royal tyranny, in the following excerpt from Arthur Wilson's *The History of Great Britain* (1653). Wilson portrays the first Lord Spencer, an opposition peer whose money came from sheep, as one who

made the Countrey a vertuous Court, where his Fields and Flockes brougthe him more calme and happie contentment, than the various and mutable dispensation of a Court... and when he was called to the Senate, was more vigilant to keep the Peoples Liberties from being a prey to the encroaching power of Monarchy, than his harmless and tender Lambes from Foxes and ravenous creatures.¹⁰

Here we may observe how the idealization of the English country estate as the new pastoral haven is allied to the growing power of a section of the landed gentry jealous of its privileges and ready to resist any encroachment of the crown on its economic liberties. But such a clear instance is difficult to come across in the early 1620s, and even when available, caution is needed when examining its expression in literature. Stray quotations from plays or poems are of little value unless one can show social pressures moulding thematic arrangement and forms of expression. The context of ideas in *The Fatal Dowry*, as was sought to be shown above,

enforces an identification of the Court with a specific social group responsible for the betrayal of national interest. "The Country," wrote Fuller in *The Church History of Britain* (1655), "hath constantly a blessing for those for whom the Court hath a curse."²⁰ The curse having been depicted as a political one as well, the blessing for gentlemen such as Novall Junior's page, it may be argued, is implicitly political.²¹

But the major point of interest lies in the new locus that Massinger tries to find for the chivalric values of honour, and the specific thematic context in which these values are put to the test. The dispensation of the Court is mutable, as Meliboeus had discovered, and this instability is mirrored even in the overt symptoms which, according to Novall Junior, indicate courtliness :

For even as the Index tells us the contents of stories, and directs to the particular chapters, even so does the outward habit and superficial order of garments (in man or woman) give us a taste of the spirit, and demonstratively poynt (as it were a manuell note from the margin) all the internal quality, and the habiliment of the soule, and there cannot be a more evident, palpable grosse manifestation of poore, degenerate dunghilly blood, and breeding, then rude unpolish'd, disorderd and slovenly outside.

(IV. i, 45-53)²²

Massinger tries to find an index of the "habiliment of the soule" firmer than this. As things stand, Charalois is as corruptible by fortune and by proximity to the Court as any. The noble Rochfort, struck by Charalois' integrity, rescues him from the city creditors and gives him his daughter Beaumelle in marriage. After this, when Romont warns him of Beaumelle's faithlessness, Charalois dismisses his well-meaning friend with a reply that could have come from Novall Junior :

Thy skill Romont, consists in camps not courts.

(III. i, 490)

Charalois has accepted Court doctrine unquestioningly enough to consider anything short of copulation "Meere complement and courtship" (440), and Romont draws the melancholy conclusion

Now wealth I see change manners and the man.

(III. i, 503)

In a later play, *The Great Duke of Florence* (1627), an identical process of corruption sets in when the Duke's nephew Giovanni comes to the court of Florence after completing his education in the country. There it was the fool, Calandrino, who had distilled the moral by saying that those who are good in the Country turn knaves in the Court (III. i, 402-405).

Against this, Massinger tries to set up an ideal of virtue independent of fortune ; he tries to root heroic values in an immutable centre, as much as the countryside is rooted in the enduring processes of nature. Rochfort says of Charalois early in the play

Vertue workes strangely with us : and his goodnesse
Rising above his fortune, seemes to me
Princelike, to will, not aske a courtesie.

(I. i, 302-304)

This internalization of the source of virtue is nothing new. Spenser had said in his poem to the sixth book of the *Faerie Queen*

But vertues seat is deepe within the mynd,
And not in outward shows, but inward thoughts defynd.
(vi, 5)¹³

The opposition of 'virtue' and 'fortune' is also familiar to the reader of Jonson's verse. In *An Ode to Himself*, for instance, Jonson writes

Minds that are great and free,
Should not on fortune pause ;
'Tis crown enough to virtue still, her own applause.¹⁴

What is significant, however, is the context in which Massinger examines the limits of the soul's freedom. Connected with it is the question of the limits of feudal and moral obligation. The source for this legal and moral problem is Seneca's first *controversia* in Book IX of *Oratorium et rhetorum sententiae, divisiones, colones*.¹⁵ Charalois discovers Beaumelle's infidelity, and asks Rochfort, her father and a judge, to give his verdict in the case. Rochfort, however, is kept blindfolded, and he sentences the offender to death. Charalois kills Beaumelle, and then Rochfort is allowed to discover that his sentence has been passed on his own daughter

and has been carried out in earnest. In words reminiscent of those of John of Gaunt in *Richard II*, I. iv, 236-237, Rochfort says that he was urged as a judge, not allowed to argue as a father. But Massinger does not go on to probe, (as Shakespeare does in *Measure for Measure*) in the light of the universality of sin, the responsibility of the individual human soul when it judges and sentences others even in a public capacity. Instead, Massinger examines conscience in conflict with social obligation. Rochfort accuses Charalois of ingratitude, for it was he who had rescued Charalois from the claws of the city creditors. This prompts Charalois to ask the crucial question of the play :

If to receive a favour, make a servant,
 And benefits are bonds to the taker
 To the imperious will of him that gives,
 Ther's none but slaves will receive courtesies
 Since they must fetter us to our dishonours.
 Can it be cal'd magnificence in a Prince
 To poure down riches, with a liberall hand,
 Upon a poore man's wants, if that must bind him
 To play the soothing parasite to his vices ?
 Or any man, because he sav'd my hand
 Presume my head and heart are at his service ?

(V. ii, 191-201)

Significant is the political light in which what could have been merely a problem of the limits of gratitude is seen. Just as Rochfort cannot presume to usurp the place held by Charalois' conscience and honour because he had helped make Charalois' fortune, the prince similarly cannot encroach on the liberty of his subject's conscience. The problem in Seneca was of the obligations of gratitude, Massinger relates this to the question of the limits of royal power. This necessarily involves the distinction between monarchy and tyranny, an issue which will demand closer attention in discussing *The Maid of Honour*.

Massinger, however, fails to make these issues part of the dramatic texture ; they hover undecidedly on the periphery of the principal emotions evoked. We begin to see why Swinburne felt that Massinger's claims to honour are more moral and intellectual than imaginative or creative.⁴⁶ The aesthetic intention and imaginative

apprehension of the material seem to waver and slacken, and the play fails to absorb scenes and episodes that use the mode of satiric city comedy. For instance, the court aspirant Liladam's sudden resolve to surrender his courtly beaver and sword and go back to his thrifty cap and tailor's bodkin is typical of the interlude-like scenes in city comedies of a didactic bent. Lines such as

Then here our quarrel ends
The gallant is turn'd Taylor and all friends.
(V. i, 107-108)

fail to justify their existence in a play capable occasionally of touching true tragic depth. This formal and emotional uncertainty merits Coleridge's criticism that Massinger's characters lack "a guiding point."²⁷ L. C. Knights' comments on Beaumont and Fletcher's *A King and No King* can be applied with perfect justice to *The Fatal Dowry*:

... the play itself is not a coherent emotional development : there is no emotion to develop. Everything, therefore, is sacrificed to the immediate effect ; we have merely a succession of emotional high spots, and the comedy is merely 'comic relief'.²⁸

Yet this very hesitancy serves to underscore urgent intellectual preoccupations (which never distracted Rowe in his plagiarized version *The Fair Penitent*) that Massinger was to build into more successful drama later. T. S. Eliot was right in saying that "Massinger dealt not with emotions so much as with social abstractions of emotions", but this is no mere failure to "vivify" Elizabethan morality and to "fit into it passionate, complete human characters". Rather it was the first unsure probings of an age compelled to try out this morality (which Eliot calls "an important convention") in new situations, political and social. Despite his failure, Massinger inaugurates the age of Marvell and Milton (as Eliot, with his unerring sense of historical direction in literature, observes) in this important sense, and not merely in exemplifying the increasing dissociation of sensibility. Eliot's main charge, that Massinger did not "out of his own personality, build a world of art, as Shakespeare and Marlowe and Jonson built", can hardly be disputed, but he was perhaps only partially correct in attributing this to Massinger's defective personality, and to his feeling being

"overlaid with received ideas". Massinger was not simply looking at life "through the eyes of his predecessors", his plays constantly evince the awareness of the mounting perplexities of a period in which received notions were being forced into incongruous social and political contexts. Eliot rightly detects in Massinger the disappearance "of all the personal and real emotions which this (Elizabethan) morality supported and into which it introduced a kind of order", but this disappearance is no mere signal of unconscious decadance ; the playwright was tracking this morality in dilemmas created by events threatening to subvert the order. In the process, Massinger indeed denuded the problems of emotional substance, especially in the tragedies which Eliot justifiably summarizes as "dreary". But in the comedies, he was able at last to integrate convention, form and personality, and this achievement is not just "fortuitous". Nor was Massinger, as a comic writer, "fortunate in the moment in which he wrote". He suffered all the disadvantage of a period of transition, and his "transitional comedy" is a significant achievement in that he could root the conventional satire of the City in an attitude which responded to the emotional needs of his troubled times.²⁹ An enquiry into the shifting connotations of ideas and abstractions like Court, City and Country therefore, may not be absolutely unrewarding in understanding Massinger's "defective sensitiveness", as well as his success as a comic playwright.

III

Charalois' question (V. ii, 191-201) had placed the issue of the liberty of the conscience in the context of political tyranny. The political context becomes central in *The Maid of Honour* (1622), and it is against this context that the attempt to root virtue in the soul is made. Camiola loves Bertoldo, but she refuses to marry him because he is a Knight of Malta, bound by his holy order to a celibate life. Moreover, their births are unequal.

Your Birth Sir
 (Without addition) were an ample Dowrie
 For one of fairer Fortunes, and this shape
 Were you ignoble, far above all value.

(I. ii, 122-125)

Repulsed, Bertoldo sets out as a volunteer warrior for Siena, where Ferdinand, Duke of Urbino, is immured after an abortive attack. Back home, Fulgentio, another of Massinger's court-spiders, imperiously proposes to Camiola. He is confident of success, for

a man in grace

May challenge awe, and priviledge by his place.

(II. i, 57-58)

He is not meanly descended like Liladam in *The Fatal Dowry*,

He hath some drops

Of the Kings blood running in his veines, deriv'd

Some ten degree off..

(I. i, 23-25)

But Camiola tells him in plain language

Howe'r your glittering out-side promise gentry,

The rudeness of your carriage and behaviour,

Speakes you a courser thing ...

(II. ii, 72-75)

When Fulgentio seeks to add weight to his suit by reminding her that he is the King's kinsman, Camiola replies

but a King may have

A foole to his kinsman.

(II. ii, 87-88)

Worth, then, is not a neccessary consequent to birth. But birth is a necessary antecedent to worth, and when merit is sought to be disengaged from fortune, we may suspect an inconsistency. Since virtue is dependent on birth, and lineage on rank, and rank again on fortune's favours, to say that virtue is independent of fortune may appear arguing in circles. We may pause here and take a look at (1) the conventional explanation of the role of lineage, and (2) Massinger's use of this 'received idea' in a provoking dramatic context. For the first, an extensive quote from that useful compendium of Renaissance ideas, Raleigh's *History of the World* (1614), will save much explanation :

... Nobilitie, or difference from the Vulgar, was not in the beginning given to the succession of blood, but to succession of vertue, as hereafter may

be proved. Though at length it was sufficient for those whose Parents were advanced, to be knowne for the Sonnes of such Fathers : and there needed then no endeavour of well-doing at all, or any contention for them to excell, upon whom glorie or worldly Nobilitie necessarily descended. Yet hereof had Nobilitie denomination in the beginning, That such as excelled others in vertue were so called... But after such time as the deserved Honour of the Father was given in reward to his posteritie, St. Hierome judged of the succession in this manner... *I see no other thing to be affected in Nobilitie, then that Noblemen are by a kinde of necessite bound not to degenerate from the vertue of their Ancestors.* For if Nobilitie be... *Vertue and ancient riches*, then to exceede in all those thinges which are *extra hominem*, as riches, power, glorie, and the like, doe no otherwise define Nobilitie, then the word (*animal*) alone doth define a reasonable man. Or if honour (according to L. Vives) be a witnesse of virtue and well-doing : and Nobilitie (after *Plutarch*) the continuance of virtue in a race or linage : then are those in whom vertue is extinguished, but like unto painted and printed papers, which ignorant men worship in steade of *Christ*, our Ladie, and other Saints... For as all things consist of matter and forme, so doth *Charron* (in his Chapter of Nobilitie) call the race and linage but the matter of Nobilitie : the forme (which life and perfect being) he maketh to be vertue, and qualitie, profitable to the commonweale. For hee is truly and entirely Noble, who maketh a singular profession of publike vertue, serving his Prince and Countrie, and being descended of Parents and Ancestors that have done the like. And although that Nobilitie, which the same Authour calleth personall, (the same which ourselves acquire by vertue and well deservings) cannot be balanced with that which is both naturall by descent, and also personall ; yet if vertue be wanting to the naturall, then is the personall and acquired Nobilitie by many degrees to be preferred : ...¹⁰

Gaspare Pallavicino had, in Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, claimed that high birth and social rank (the latter subject to the vagaries of fortune) are not necessary for 'naturall' nobility :

On the contrary, as I have said, the finest gifts of Nature are often found in persons of very humble family.¹¹

Count Lodovico da Canossa had dismissed this objection on the ground that in nature good begets good, and that favourable first impressions are necessary for a person to be a successful courtier.¹²

In Charron and Ralegh, the advantage of a good lineage is accounted for as a reward unto the progeny of the virtuous, but virtue is seen at the root of all nobility. This position differs from

that of Count Lodovico in an important way, because although the successors of the virtuous are entitled to the blessings of a high birth, virtue itself is not begotten of blood. While Spenser could say

That gentle bloud will gentle manners breed ..

Raleigh cites St. Bernard and St. Chrysostom immediately after the passage quoted above to remind readers that the matter of all men is but dust and that we all are born naked. If man is made to look more noble than dust, it is because of "the cunning of his Creatour" who has lent him a mind and a soul. He concludes the chapter after quoting a few lines from *A Mirror for Magistrates* :

For true Nobilitie standeth in the Trade
Of vertuous life ; not in the fleshly line :
For bloud is brute, but Gentrie is divine.³³

Raleigh's, of course, was no original observation, and Massinger could have found more than one source for this attitude which was particularly relevant to the milieu preceding the Civil War. There is, however, indubitable evidence that Massinger knew his Raleigh well, since he almost certainly relied on the Antiochus-Hannibal episodes in Chapters 2-6 of Book V of Raleigh's *History* for the plot of *Believe as You List*.³⁴

So much for "received ideas". It now remains to see in what light these issues are set in the play. Camiola's insistence on virtue being the true index of nobility is a corollary to her faith in the inviolability of the mind. Royal prerogative has to stop short at the threshold of the sovereign sphere, and this freedom of the mind is throughout seen in relation to the limits of princely authority. When she tells the presumptuous Fulgentio

I am a Queen in mine owne house nor must you
Expect an empire here

(II. ii, 77-78)

she combines with it a concern for the dignity of womanhood, a concern which Massinger shared with his collaborator and sometime preceptor, John Fletcher.³⁵ (Marcelia in *The Duke of Milan* and Sophia in *The Picture* literalize this metaphor of a woman being queen at home.)

Fulgentio is still importunate, and produces the King's signet ring as token of royal command for Camiola to accept him. Camiola tells him

though the King may
Dispose of my life and goods, my mind's mine owne,
And shall never be yours

(II. ii, 168-170)

Later the king himself comes to Camiola to command her affection. Camiola's reaction needs to be quoted at length.

With your leave, I must not kneele Sir,
While I replie to this : but thus rise up
In my defence, and tell you as a man
(Since when you are unjust, the deity
Which you may challenge as a King, parts from you)
'Twas never read in holy writ, or morall
That subjects on their loyalty were oblig'd
To love their Soveraignes vices ; your grace Sir,
To such an undeserver is no vertue.
... Say you should love wine,
You being the King, and cause I am your subject,
Must I be ever drunke ? Tyrants, not kings,
By violence, from humble vassals force
The liberty of their soules. I could not love him,
And to compell affection, as I take it,
Is not found in your prerogative.

(IV. iv, 52-67)

Spiritual sovereignty set against political carries us to the question much debated at the period, the subject's obligation to the tyrant. In the Tudor idea of kingship, monarchical absolutism was subject to the king's observance of the divine covenant, but it was for God, and not the subjects, to decide whether the king had forfeited his right to rule. William Griffith's surreptitious 1565 edition of *Gorboduc* contained those lines, expunged perhaps by the Puritan Norton, that represent the orthodox Tudor position in such matters.

(Though kings forget to govern as they ought
Yet subjects must obey as they are bound.)
That no cause serves, whereby the subject may
Call to account the doings of his prince,

Much less in blood by sword to work revenge,
No more than may the hand cut off the head ;
In act nor speech, no not in secret thought
The subject may rebel against his lord,
Or judge of him that sits in Caesar's seat,
With grudging mind to damn those he mislikes.

(V. i, 42 ff)⁸⁰

Similar sentiments abound in Tudor literature from the 1574 homily *Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion*⁸⁷ to John of Gaunt's firm assertion in *Richard II*

God's is the quarrel ; for God's substitute
His deputy anointed in his sight,
Hath caused his death ; the which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift
An angry arm against his minister.

(I. ii, 37-41)

Massinger does not deviate from convention in the conclusion to *The Fatal Dowry*, and Charmi mouths the cliché of Tudor revenge plays about leaving vengeance to God :

We are taught
By this sad president, how just soever
Our reasons are to remedy our wrongs,
We are yet to leave them to their will and power,
That to that purpose have authority,

(V. ii, 338-342)

Yet in that very play this hackneyed conclusion was rendered unconvincing by Charalois' crucial question about the limits of political obligation in V. ii, 191-201. We were already aware that the strain of shifting contexts was becoming too much for the received notions. Camiola takes the inevitable step nearer the crisis when she withdraws loyalty and obedience to the tyrant who tries to force the "liberty of the soul".

The orthodox aversion to resistance, therefore, was becoming incongruous in the changing dramatic context. Parallelly, in reaction to mounting political compulsions, the attitude to tyranny was hardening in political and religious radicals. The correspondence is significant. It points to the kind of pressure that was denuding

the Elizabethan moral scheme of emotional substance in Massinger, and suggests why he was busier examining "social abstractions of emotion". A brief digression into the shifting attitude to tyranny and resistance in thus called for.

Thomas Norton, probably responsible for the deletion of the lines quoted from Griffith's 1565 edition of *Gorboduc*, had translated Calvin's *Institutes*. Irving Ribner quotes the following passage from Norton's translation of Calvin :

For though the correcting of unbrideled governement be the revengement of the Lorde, let us not byandby thynke that it is committed to us, to whom there is given no other commaundement but to obey and suffer... For if there be at this time any Magistrates for the behalfe of the people... I do not forbide them according to their office to withstande the outragynge lycentiousnesse of kynges, that I affirme that if they winke at kynges wilfully rayng over and treading down the poore communalitie, their dissembling is not without wicked breache of faithe, because they deceitfully betray the libertie of the people, whereof thei know themselves to be apppointed protectors by the ordinance of God."

Put 'nobility' or 'gentry' in place of 'Magistrates', and locate them in the Country, protecting their people from tyrants as their sheep from wolves, and you see this concept of the magistrates' responsibility extended into the idea of the true gentry's burden of preserving "the Peoples Liberties from being a prey to the encroaching power of the Monarchy", as was seen in the passage quoted earlier from Arthur Wilson's *The History of Great Britain*.

Both Luther and Calvin, however, disapproved of active resistance to the sovereign. But for historical reasons their followers in France and Scotland had to provide doctrinal sanction to such resistance. In the passage cited from Norton's translation of Calvin, magistrates were seen as divinely appointed trustees of the liberty of the people (neither 'liberty' nor 'people', obviously, are to be taken in a democratic sense). This idea is worked into a doctrine for legitimizing rebellion by the Huguenots, especially by the authors of the notorious *Vindicae Contra Tyrannos* (1579). Two contracts are here postulated—one between the people and the sovereign, leading to the creation of the State, and the other between the people, including the

sovereign, and God, leading to the creation of the Church. If the claims of the two are in conflict, then the interests of the second, holier covenant ought to override those of the first. Hence the responsible *nobilitas* had every right to resist a tyrant or a heretical king. Similar opinions were voiced by Puritan leaders, and they came to regard virtue, which alone determined nobility, as consisting of the discharge of this particular duty enjoined by the holy covenant. Examples of this attitude are Christopher Goodman's *How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyed* (1558), and John Knox's *History of the Reformation in Scotland* (printed 1586). In the latter, Knox's replies to Mary Queen of Scots remind us of Camiola's reply to the King :

"Madam (said he), as right religion took neither original strength nor authority from worldly princes but from the Eternal God alone, so are not subjects not bound to frame their religion according to the appetites of their princes... And so, Madam, ye may perceive that subjects are not bound to the religion of their princes, albeit they are commanded to give them obedience."

"Think ye (quod she), that subjects having power may resist their princes ?"

"If their princes exceed their bounds (quod he), Madam, and do against that wherefore they should be obeyed, it is no doubt that they may be resisted, even by power."³⁰

The Maid of Honour, along with *The Virgin Martyr* and *The Renegado*, was chosen for special mention by Gifford as evidence of Massinger's Catholicism.⁴⁰ But the instances referred to above reiterate that Massinger need not have been a Roman Catholic in order to form his attitude to tyranny. There is indeed a remarkable correspondence between the treatment of certain issues in Massinger and that in some Catholic thinkers, notably the Jesuit philosopher Francis Suarez. But the idea of the right of resistance in Suarez is not without echoes in Johannes Althusius, Hugo Grotius, the authors of *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, John Knox and his fellow Puritans, or even in Richard Hooker. Althusius, like Bellarmin, thought that the source of sovereignty was the people, and in this he differed from Suarez who held the orthodox view that sovereignty was ultimately derived from God. Yet Althusius shares Suarez's

idea of the double contract—the first for the formation of political community, and the second for the transfer of sovereignty to certain individuals. A theory of contract entails the right of resistance to unlawful rule, and in this Althusius and Suarez agree. Grotius, whose theory of natural law owes something to Suarez, could not approve of rebellion. Yet he conceded that orders violating natural or divine positive law ought not to be obeyed. Even Hooker, champion of Tudor absolutism, accepted Aquinas' idea that the human positive law must conform to natural law,⁴¹ and that laws which do not so conform, are not binding in conscience.⁴² And during the troubled reign of Mary Queen of Scots, Knox explained away the fine distinction between non-conformity and active resistance :

"Yea (quod she), but none of those men raised the sword against their princes."

"Yet Madam (quod he), ye cannot deny that they resisted : for those that obey not the commandments that are given, in some sort resist."⁴³

I am far from suggesting that doctrinal commitment is essential for the use of ideas in literature, or that Massinger shared the extreme Puritan zeal for tyrannicide. A look at the dates of the principal works of these thinkers will convince us that all of their ideas could not have been available to Massinger at this time. Nonetheless, these allusions may help dissuade us from the distracting pursuit of Massinger's Catholicism. Such pursuits tempt one to relate extracts to doctrine, neglecting the total dramatic context. Moreover, Massinger's anti-Spain posture in certain plays certainly does not promise great rewards for such pursuits.⁴⁴

We may turn once again to Ralegh for an instance of the absorption of philosophical reflections on the subject in less specialized but aware circles, and of the form in which Massinger was most likely to have derived these notions. In Chapter IX, Book I of his *History*, Ralegh gives an account of the development of political community from the family which has parallels in Hooker, Bodin and Suarez. Ralegh underplayed the role of consent in the formation of sovereignty—an idea important to Suarez and Hooker. Nor did he share Bodin's view that the sovereign is unrestrained by civil law. Like Suarez, he held that political community is born of Necessity

inherent in human nature, that the actual formation of civil magistracy follows the dictate of Reason, and that civil law, binding even rulers, is born of Necessity and Reason together. But Necessity and Reason are both derived from God, and it is therefore He who ordains Kings, and natural law ordains the actual person who is to rule. Raleigh thus concludes that the world is ruled by threefold justice—natural, divine and civil, corresponding to the demands of natural piety, conscience, and duty. But when a tyrant rules, civil duty cannot bind conscience, since a tyrant's is "a sole and absolute rule, exercised according to the will of the Commander, without respect or observation of the lawes of God, or Men".⁴⁵

The concept of 'honour' in Camiola's reply to the King is a commitment to this idea of conscience which is not bound when the monarch loses his right to rule by forcing the 'liberty of the soul'. But this is no isolated reflection : the idea is central to the thematic structure, as even the title of the play suggests. The significance of the problem for Massinger becomes clear if one compares the predicament of Camiola with Amintor's in *The Maid's Tragedy*. The King there had enforced the choice of Evadne for his bride on Amintor, who was earlier betrothed to Aspatia. But after a flicker of regret from Amintor

It was the king first moved me to 't ; - but he
Has not my will in keeping.

(II. i, 118-119)

the issue peters out, and Beaumont and Fletcher leave the political implications of the situation unexplored. That Massinger gets more involved in the 'social abstractions of emotion' here points to an intellectual urgency created by political perplexities in an age of transition.

The centrality of the problem for the play is seen in the broad scheme of contrast in the plot. Camiola's steadfastness in rejecting Fulgentio in spite of royal orders is contrasted with Bertoldo's surrender of conscience to Aurelia, the Duchess of Siena. Aurelia takes a fancy to Bertoldo, held prisoner in Siena. Dazzled by her wealth and social position, Bertoldo breaks faith with Camiola, who had ransomed him after the King had refused to do so." (Court and

City again join hands : the cowards Anthonio and Gasparo, the products of Court ease and City 'valour', are ransomed by the King.) While Camiola remains the true maid of *honour* and King Roberto the *just* ruler, Bertoldo loses his *honour* by surrendering his conscience, and Aurelia her *justice* by using her power to compel affection. (A similar structural contrast is developed between Paulina's constancy against the Muslim viceroy Asambeg, and Vitelli's momentary surrender to the amorous Turkish princess Donusa in the play *The Renegado*.) Both Bertoldo and Aurelia, in other words, violate the 'liberty of the soul'.

It is this 'liberty' that allows Camiola to rise above rank and fortune ; that is, she *acquires* true *nobility* by her *virtue*. When in the last scene Camiola discloses to the King that Bertoldo (who has returned to Sicily with Aurelia) is her betrothed, the question of

The distance and disparity betweene
Their births and fortunes

(V. ii, 93-94)

is raised. Camiola points out that Bertoldo is now almost a manumized slave since she had ransomed him, but this now appears an inconsequential technicality. The 'virtues' of Camiola's 'mind' makes her

an ample fortune
For an absolute Monarch.

(V. ii, 164-165)

She retires to the cloister and Bertoldo rejoins the order of the Knights of Malta : the claims of the spirit triumph over those of fortune. The resolution is tame, but this time no attempt at high tragedy enfeebles the problem's power to disturb.

A point of interest is the fate of Camiola's faithful servant Adorni. He is in love with his mistress throughout, but declares it only when Camiola learns of Bertoldo's imprisonment. She spurns him as below her social station, and sends him to Siena with the ransom money. Adorni stays faithful, however, and on behalf of his mistress extracts a promise of marriage from Bertoldo. In the light of Bertoldo's treachery, Adorni later appears the worthier man, and Camiola wills him a third of her wealth before retiring to the

nunnery. Virtue is thus rewarded with fortune, but Massinger is yet unwilling to endorse an unequal match. His urge to make virtue the determinant of nobility, and to insulate the sovereign sphere of the soul from the caprice of fortune, however, makes such a step a logical inevitability. Massinger finally takes the step in *The Great Duke of Florence*, where the duchess Fiorinda marries Sanazarro, since, as Fiorinda says herself,

Yet true love must not
Know or degree, or distances.
(V. i, 137-138)

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Cited by Perez Zagorin, *The Court and the Country : the Beginning of the English Revolution*, London, 1969, p. 24.
2. Zagorin detects this assumption at work even in 1656 when James Harrington wrote in *Oceana* that government was a thing "peculiar unto the genius of a gentleman". *op. cit.*, p. 24
3. J. H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History*, London, 1961, p. 128
4. J. C. Smith & E. de Selincourt (eds), *Spenser : Poetical Works*, London, 1975, p. 337
5. *Ibid*, p. 380
6. Ian Donaldson (ed), *Ben Jonson : Poems*, London, 1975, p. 91
7. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, New York, 1973, p. 22
8. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, (trans. George Bull), Harmondsworth, 1976, p. 57
9. Smith & de Selincourt, *op. cit.*, p. 378
10. Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 251-252. Also see Jonson's poem *To the World : A Farewell for a Gentlewoman, Virtuous and Noble* (Donaldson, p. 95-96) for a restatement of the idea.
11. John Hayward (ed), *Robert Herrick : Poems from Hesperides and Noble Numbers*, Harmondsworth, 1961, p. 39
12. *The Listener*, 4 Oct., 1973, p. 448-449
13. Brian Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*, London, 1968. See the chapter 'City Comedy as a Genre'.
14. 'To Kenelm, John, George', Donaldson, p. 267
15. Juvenal, *The Sixteen Satires*, (trans. Peter Green), Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 177. See also Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, 29 :

Another man who boasts of his ancestry he might call low-born, and bastard because he is so far removed from virtue, which is the sole source of nobility.

(transl. Betty Radice, Harmondsworth, 1971, p. 105)

16. All references are to Philip Edwards & Colin Gibson (eds), *The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger (PPPM)*, 5 vols., Oxford, 1976. Dates of Massinger's plays have also been taken from the introductions in this edition. I have not modernized the spelling except for changing, 'i's to 'j's, 'v's to 'u's, and 'u's to 'v's in the interest of clarity.
17. See, for example, *The Spanish Tragedy*, II iv, 281-290.
18. *Hours in a Library*, (Third Series) 1879. Cited in *PPPM*, I, p. ixiii.
19. Cited by Zagorin, p. 36.
20. Cited by Zagorin, p. 37. The remark dates back to 1627
21. In this discussion I use the word 'political' in its modern sense.
22. See the Master of the Habit's speech in Massinger's *The Emperor of the East*, I. ii, 187-210, in which he dilates on the varying protocol the courtier must observe with country gentlemen, merchants, mercers, drapers and tailors, depending on how much he owed them. He then proceeds to set down the ideal time-table for the courtier (222-235): 'strong cullise' in bed to heighten appetite, 'shuttle-cock' for exercise (tennis and riding are too boisterous for the young courtier), meditation on how to court his mistress, on pre-arranged jests with friends to seem witty in the lady's presence and on the gait and outfit proper to the occasion, and finally deep thought on the length of the sword and the fashion of the hilt (the blade does not matter, and " 'twere barbarism to use it").
23. Smith & de Selincourt, p. 337. See also IL ix, 8, p. 113.
24. Donaldson, p. 168. See also *To Robert, Earl of Salisbury*. p. 34. Donaldson cites *Sejanus*, III, 88-89, 321-325, IV, 68-69, p. 34n. For another off-hand example from the drama of the period, see *Philaster*, III. i, 12-15 :

who, but that people, please
To let him be a prince, is born a slave
In that which should be his most noble part,
His mind ?

25. *PPPM*, I. See Introduction to the play.
26. Gosse & Wise (eds), *Contemporaries of Shakespeare*. Cited in *PPPM*, I, p. lxiv.
27. R. F. Brinkley (ed), *Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century*. Cited in *PPPM*, I, p. ix.
28. L. C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*, Harmondsworth, 1962, p. 245
29. 'Philip Massinger', *The Sacred Wood*, London, 1967, p. 123-143

30. Sir Walter Ralegh. *History of the World*, I. ix, 4 (ed. C. A. Patrides, London, 1971, p. 162-163)
31. Castiglione, *op. cit.*, p. 56
32. In spite of his insistence on the mind being the true seat of virtue, Spenser sums up this orthodox explanation of the necessity of high birth in the *Faerie Queene*, VI. iii; 1-2 :

For a man by nothing is so well bewrayed,
As by his manners in which plaine is showne
Of what degree and what race he is growne.
For seldome seene, a trotting Stallion get
An' ambling Colt, that is his proper owne:
So seldome seene, that one in baseness set
Doth noble courage shew, with courteous manners met.
But evermore contrary hath bene tryde,
That gentle blood will gentle manners breed ;

See also VI. v, 1. For an echo of the other part of Count Lodovico's argument, that blood ensures 'natural' courtly grace, so necessary for first impressions, see VI. ii, 2.

33. C. A. Patrides (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 164. The first line of the quotation is slightly different in *A Mirror* :

So that true gentry standeth in the trade

The entire passage in Owen Glendower's story is significant in showing the difference between the two attitudes. Whereas Spenser, to illustrate that lineage fosters virtue in men, says that a trotting stallion seldom begets an ambling colt, the poet here marshals instances from nature to show that no fish, fowl, flesh or plant

Of their true dam the property doth want.

but that man is an exception to this rule

sith severally they have
A mind whose manners are by learning made...

L. B. Campbell (ed), *A Mirror
for Magistrates*, Cambridge, 1938,
p. 121-122

34. PPPM, III, p. 293-302

35. See L. C. Knights, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

36. *The Minor Elizabethan Drama*, vol. 1, London, 1951, p. 43. The lines within brackets were retained in the authorized edition.

37. See E. M. W. Tillyard's discussion of this homily in *Shakespeare's History Plays*, London, 1956, p. 65-70.

38. Quoted by Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, Princeton, 1957, p. 46.
39. H. E. Fodsick (ed), *Great Voices of the Reformation : An Anthology*, New York, 1952, p. 267-268
40. W. Gifford, *The Plays of Philip Massinger*, vol. 1, London, 1813, p. xliv (AMS Press, Inc. reprint, New York, 1966)
41. See discussion of the idea of natural law in connection with the plays *The Bondman*, *The Renegado*, and *The Unnatural Combat* in the fourth section of this paper.
42. *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, I, 10. See F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. III, New York, 1963, chapters 20 & 22, for a general discussion of the issues.
43. H. E. Fodsick (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 268
44. S. R. Gardiner, in 'The Political Element in Massinger', *The Contemporary Review*, Aug. 1876, reprinted in *New Shakespeare Society Transactions*, 1875-76, p. 314-331, argues that some of Massinger's plays are political allegories of the Pembrokian opposition. His views were anticipated by Thomas Davies, in 'Some Account of the Life of Philip Massinger', appended to Mason's 1779 edition of Massinger's plays, and cited by Edwards & Gibson, *PPPM*, I, p. liii-liv.
45. Patrides, p. 158

IN MEMORIAM

Just a week before, mid-way on my evening walk along Southern Avenue, I had dropped into Prof. Probodh Chandra Ghose's residence at Keyātalā and passed an hour in his genial company. After the usual exchange of inquiries about each other's health, with a friendly advice to consult his E. N. T. specialist for my chronic throat trouble, he entertained me with his lively talk on all sorts of topics under the sun. Little could I imagine that delightful evening that so soon after I would receive a shocking invitation to his *Srāddha Sava* !

The late morning memorial function, held in the pandal erected before his house, was simple and moving. The fair gathering of friends and colleagues, one after another, paid tribute to their dear departed. Aged litterateur Pramatha Nath Bisi fumbled reminiscences of long summer afternoons at their favourite lake-side meeting spot, the two coming from opposite directions. Professor R. K. Dasgupta, a close friend of PCG from his student days, spoke not only of his high qualities of head and heart but also humorously referred to his total unmindfulness about personal matters in which he was dependent on somebody's care, like a big child.

But what impressed me most on that occasion was the portrait in the background of the dais— PCG's photograph, not of recent times, but a rather boyish portrait of his student days on the threshold of manhood ! It was, I found, a replica of the photo in the portrait-gallery of ex-incumbents in the room of the Secretary of the University College of Arts.

This accidental selection, however, happened to be the true representation of the man ; he seemed to have halted at that stage of life and refused, inwardly, to grow old. Though he departed sometime after his retirement, PCG could be thought of, never as an aging figure, but ever as an image of unwaning youthfulness. He radiated *joie de vivre* in every sphere in which he played a part.

Generations of students in the Postgraduate English Department enjoyed his lively interpretation of imaginative literature, especially

poetry and drama. He was admired for his depth of erudition in classical, particularly, Greek drama. And he did original research in the elements of myth and religion in drama. He helped the growth of a large circle of drama-lovers by his vigorous recreation of pulsating life and social milieu in his play-reading in the classroom or in his coaching young men and women for regional drama fêtes or Inter-University Youth Festivals. He always found pleasure in work as a drama-guide, and discovered, in course of such exercises, the histrionic talents of a Keya Chakravarti, a Rudra Prasad Sengupta, and an Ajitesh Bandyopādhyay. Though not appearing on the public stage, PCG took a pioneer's interest in the emergence of Little Theatre groups we observe today.

* * *

Prof. Ghose and myself, both lecturers in City College, joined the Post-Graduate English Department in 1945 and 1944 respectively, where we were together for 31 years as close friends, and our relation was never strained. The familiar scene of PCG and KCL, sitting side by side in the second floor staff room of Ashutosh Building, absorbed in unending gossip, induced our venerable colleague, sister Nirmala Sinha, to dub the two "a Laurel-Hardy pair".

We worked in close co-operation, not only in normal routine of academic matters, but also in various co-curricular activities, like socials, debates, and drama performances, receptions, farewells and so on. I admired his enthusiasm and interest in details in organising a function as a veteran M. C. (Master of Ceremonies). He associated himself with all sorts of healthy movements, like Youth Hostels and the Red Cross Society. I enjoyed his company in Social Service and Youth Leadership Training camps, and Adult Literacy campaigns in remote rural areas, and also in Youth Welfare seminars and Summer Institutes with re-orientation courses for young college teachers, in urban academic atmosphere.

I recollect with pleasure our friendly confrontation on one such occasion. It was a seminar for university teachers from eastern India, held in the cool, bracing air of Darjeeling. We were provided with two adjacent bed-steads in the first-floor dormitory. PCG would read, as was his wont, beyond mid-night and sleep till late

morning, rising just in time for a hurried breakfast and the day's programme, while myself, a believer in 'early to bed and early to rise', got up long before sun-rise and in shivering cold climbed up some height to have, if luck favoured, a rare view of dazzling Kānchanjungha. PCG would regale the whole party with amusing doggerel verses composed on the mock-heroic situation created by my boots resounding on the wooden floor, in the pre-dawn unearthly hour, as I was preparing for my 'foolish outing' into the fog !

How appropriately did a select circle of friends fondly nicknamed PCG "Mākhanda", a brother endued with the qualities of butter-like softness and smoothness, effusing energy and grace, a charming personality with "sweetness and light" of true culture, a perfect specimen of the fast-disappearing race, a gentleman !

K. C. Lahiri.

POETIC DRAMA AND "MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL"*

P. C. GHOSH

(I)

In early times it was customary to write drama in verse. Men loved poetry in drama, and the use of verse was a natural convention. As prose developed, it appeared in drama and replaced verse. Narrative poetry gave way to prose fiction, and the place of Chaucer was taken by the novelist. But the development of prose is not the only reason for this change. There is a deeper reason which lies in the spirit and taste of the modern age. The movement to revive poetic drama is therefore very significant.

There is a growing impression that prose drama is not enough. Even an inveterate prose dramatist like Somerset Maugham writes : "But my melancholic prognosis applied only to the modern realistic drama."¹ He makes his view clearer when he writes : "To my mind the drama took a wrong turning when the demand for realism led it to abandon the ornament of verse."²

What is the limitation of prose drama ? "Prose drama", says Abercrombie, "gives you an imitation of the ready-made boot of existence, gives it you as exactly as it can.... The preference for prose plays over poetic drama is therefore a preference for ordinary appearance over spiritual

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reality : it is, in fact, a form of materialism."⁸ It is customary to-day to assure the common man that his taste is the standard. But his mind does not move quickly enough to follow the flight of poetry. Poetry seeks to present the essence of life, and in doing so it becomes an interpretation or criticism of life. But life in dilution is the stuff of prose drama which is easily acceptable to the modern common man. Clifford Bax reports that he heard a soldier whispering to his girl : "Oh, come along ! This is one of them old plays where you can't understand anythink."⁹ The play was *The Taming of the Shrew* ! But it is hardly fair to blame the common man alone. Every director complains of the modern actor's difficulty in reciting verse. Even our literary style is controlled by the pride of understatement, and prose of a subdued kind is the order of the day. So Raymond Williams writes : "In the present situation, naturalist prose drama, although discredited among a minority, remains the dominant theatrical form."¹⁰

This is not meant to denounce prose, for prose has its victories probably not much less renowned than those of poetry. But what is poetic drama ? Eliot writes : "A verse play is not a play done into verse, but a different kind of play : in a way more realistic than 'naturalistic drama', because, instead of clothing nature in poetry, it should remove the surface of things, expose the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance.... So the poet with ambitions of the theatre, must discover the laws, both of another kind of verse and of another kind of drama."¹¹

Yeats remarks : "All imaginative art remains at a distance, and this distance once chosen must be firmly held against a pushing world. Verse, ritual, music and dance in association with action require

that gesture, costume, facial expression, stage arrangement must help in keeping the door."⁷

All this shows the responsibility of the modern poetic dramatist and also exposes the cause of his failure. It is not that poetry cannot produce dramatic tension or reinforce a dramatic situation. In Shakespeare's plays poetry and tension come together; even the rhythm of verse produces it. The main trouble of poetic drama to-day is the divorce between poetry and drama. Too often the entrance of Poetry means the exit of Drama. The poetic dramatist deliberately presents his chorus-like devices and starts fondling his phrases and lines, allowing his poetry to stop his play. But a play must move on, and only by moving on it can produce that sense of action which is the soul of drama. Chants and rhythmic prose, nursery rhymes and solo songs, masques and masks, pageants and choruses and the archaic remnants of ritual-drama have so far failed to make poetic drama truly dramatic and to establish it. Poetic drama, as we find it to-day, is certainly a refinement of naturalist prose drama at certain points by the use of poetry and verse. But there is little important development of verse and poetry towards the status of drama.

What are the main problems of modern poetic drama? Naturally, the first question is whether poetic drama can be made to serve all our purposes, to do all that has been done and is being done by prose drama, and *more*. Eliot says: "I believe ... that poetry is the natural and complete medium for drama; that the prose play is a kind of abstraction capable of giving you only a part of what the theatre can give."⁸ But this means the end of prose drama, which is not desirable and which is not what Eliot means when he wants the poetic dramatist to discover "the laws, both of another kind of

verse and of another kind of drama." Even if we admit that prose drama dwells only on "the surface of things," it will endure as long as the surface will remain. Eliot himself is an admirer of "great prose dramatists—such as Ibsen and Chekhov," and one may add a few more names.

Abercrombie states only a part of the general problem when he writes: "One more thing remains to be briefly considered. Can a play written in poetry deal conveniently with contemporary life? Well, why not?"⁹ But the crux of the problem is *how*, not *why*. Eliot makes a more *positive* approach: "Verse plays, it has been generally held, should either take their subject matter from some mythology, or else should be about some remote historical period, far enough away from the present for the characters... to be licensed to talk in verse.. Picturesque period costume renders verse much more acceptable."¹⁰ One may add the special effects of light, sound and decor—any device to make the play and the stage remote enough to make the use of verse natural, credible and convincing. But Eliot's approach does not solve the problem stated by Abercrombie. On the other hand, it shows the limitations of poetic drama. In fact, we are thrown into the position of Yeats: "All imaginative art remains at a distance." There is not a single outstanding example in contemporary poetic drama to prove that this problem has been satisfactorily solved. If we notice anything like the semblance of success it comes through remoteness produced by exotic devices which keep art a distance. A play like *The Ascent of F 6* presents contemporary life on two planes—remote and immediate—but the one invades the other causing too many jolts that shake the play to its foundation.

Eliot writes: "If the poetic drama is to

reconquer its place, it must, in my opinion, enter into overt competition with prose drama."¹¹ At the same time he feels the general problem : "What we have to do is to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre ; not to transport the audience into some imaginary world totally unlike its own, an unreal world in which poetry is tolerated."¹² This means, in a way, a change in the spirit of the age, a change in life itself.

There is no reason why poetic drama must enter into competition with prose drama. Prose drama will be written and will be popular, and great dramatists, let us hope, will raise it to a very high level of excellence. Let there be prose plays and verse plays and plays which justify the mixture of verse and prose. The problem and future of poetic drama should be considered independently of the question of any competition.

The medium of poetic drama is our next problem. It is useful to examine, in this connection, some of the views of Eliot. He says that "no play should be written in verse for which prose is *dramatically* adequate." But it is difficult to agree with him without thinking of any competition between prose and verse. Let us be satisfied if poetry does not appear as decoration, if it justifies itself dramatically, independently of what prose does or does not. He also says : "And from this it follows, again, that the audience ... should be too intent upon the play to be wholly conscious of the medium."¹³ But one cannot even guess the possibilities of drama, of its technique and of the working of a master artist. A dramatist may want his audience to be "wholly conscious of the medium". Shakespeare wanted his audience to be conscious of the change from verse to prose in the Porter Scene in *Macbeth*.

Eliot himself refers to it and dwells on the ironic contrast in the alternation of scenes in prose with scenes in verse in *Henry IV*. The "consciousness of the difference" does not always mean the consciousness of "the play and the language of the play as two separate things".

All art appears to be artificial because all art seeks to concentrate on the essence of life and to establish an order. The essence is the matter and the order is the form. Eliot writes : "Whether we use prose or verse on the stage, they are both but means to an end. The difference, from one point of view, is not so great as we might think. In those prose plays which survive ... the prose in which the characters speak is as remote, for the best part, from the vocabulary, syntax and rhythm of our ordinary speech ... as verse is So if you look at it in this way, it will appear that prose on the stage is as artificial as verse : or alternatively, that verse can be as natural as prose."¹⁴ But here is an apology for the use of verse which is weakened because several considerations have been left out—the degrees of artificiality in prose and verse, the qualitative difference between prose and verse, and the possibility of verse doing the business of prose and something more.

Eliot thinks that a mixture of prose and verse in the same play should be avoided because each transition marks the audience "aware, with a jolt, of the medium." But he attaches undue importance to the jolt and the awareness of the medium. The jolt is certainly not the only reason. On the contrary, sometimes it will be necessary to produce the jolt. A mixture is to be avoided in poetic drama also on other grounds. In the present circumstances the establishment of verse as a convention is nearly as important as the establishment of poetic

drama itself. A mixture is likely to be misunderstood ; it may mean to some an acknowledgement that verse has failed. In fact, the modern poetic dramatist often uses prose because he is not able to make his verse elastic enough. In poetic drama, which means drama that offers a poetic interpretation of life in verse, it should be possible to produce a jolt or effect a simple transition through a change in the quality and rhythm of verse.

The real problem of the medium is not the mixture of prose with verse but the development of the right verse that serves all dramatic purposes. Eliot admits this difficulty : “.... when we find some situation which is intractable in verse, it is merely that our form of verse is inelastic... ...we must either develop our verse, or avoid having to introduce such scenes.... But if our verse is to have so wide a range that it can say anything that has to be said, it follows that it will not be ‘poetry’ all the time.”¹⁵ But Shakespeare’s verse is not ‘poetry’ all the time. It is ‘poetry’, so that it may be truly dramatic. In fact, the best blank verse of Shakespeare is not to be sought only in the passages which are known for their poetry ; it is to be studied also in the passages which are very efficient and business-like, passages that compete with good dramatic prose. At the same time it is only fair to admit that writing good dramatic prose is by no means easy. Shaw writes, in his characteristic way, in the preface to his verse play *The Admirable Bashville* that he chose to write in blank verse because it is much easier to write it than prose !

Eliot exaggerates the importance of “the unconscious effect of the verse.” The ways of poetry are mysterious, and one can never even guess how a miracle is performed by poetry in drama, especially when the response of the audience is at times almost

spiritual. There are moments in Shakespeare's plays when one is unconscious of the medium which is verse. All that we are conscious of is the moving drama of life :

Ulysses : What hath she done, Price, that can soil
our mothers ?

Troilus : Nothing at all, unless that this were she.
(Troilus and Cressida : V, 2.)

But there are also great moments when we are made aware of the presence of poetry, of verse as the medium, independent of the drama of character and situation, and as poetry and drama move together, the consciousness of the effect of verse stimulates our consciousness of drama :

We too alone will sing like birds i' the cage ;
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness : so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news ; and we'll talk with them too,
Who loses and who wins ; who's in, who's out ;
And take upon's the mystery of things,
As it we were God's spies : and we'll wear out,
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones,
That ebb and flow by th' moon.

(King Lear : V, 2.)

The problem of the medium is also the problem

of communication. Eliot says that his first experience in writing dramatic verse was that he was writing for other voices lines aimed to produce an immediate effect on an unknown and unprepared audience. But this is only a very small part of the problem. Writing dramatic verse is more difficult than writing poetic verse because the dramatist has to be far more alert and flexible. He has to control a much wider range of thoughts and feelings, especially in relation to a number of very different characters and a variety of situations, and has to give to the whole pattern a movement essential to drama. His verse must be very elastic indeed to enable him to meet all the requirements of the stage and acting, including gestures, pauses and movements. Most of our poetic dramatists fail to make their verse serve dramatic purposes with the result that drama becomes 'poetry.'

The verse-medium of the medieval drama was very different from that of the Elizabethan drama. In a way, it seems that it had greater prospects of freedom, especially because of the simplicity of the medieval drama. But the establishment of blank verse in the Elizabethan age was a revolutionary change, and its importance cannot be overestimated. The Elizabethan blank verse with its formal features could be a very great handicap but in the hands of Shakespeare it became surprisingly supple and elastic. The medium that enabled Shakespeare to do the wonders that he did has not been fully analysed. It is useful to study carefully Shakespeare's choice and positioning of words, the degrees of 'poetry' in his verse, its music, its movement, its pauses, variations in rhythm and tone, its relation to voice and gesture—in short, the entire contribution of the verse-pattern to drama and the stage. Even a simple device like ending a speech by breaking the regular line to gain a pause before the line is taken up in the speech of

the next speaker shown great variety. Blank verse ensured stability and precision ; it established order and discipline ; it organized poetic drama. Subsequently, no other verse was competent to take its place, and the new drama has chosen prose.

"I do not suppose", writes Maugham, "blank verse can profitably be used again, but a quick, running metre like that used by the old Spanish dramatists, though with less frequent rhymes, may well be acceptable."¹⁶ Eliot says : "The problem ... is to get away from Shakespeare ... That is not so easy ... I will wake up to find that I have been writing bad Shakespearean blank verse."¹⁷ It is, however, difficult to believe that blank verse has completely exhausted itself as a dramatic medium. The view that it has lost its flexibility "after extensive use for non-dramatic poetry" is hardly acceptable. It is the poetic dramatist who has failed to make blank verse flexible. It is his failure that makes the rhythm of blank verse seem "too remote from the movement of modern speech."

If blank verse as a convention is rejected, unrhymed verse in lines of varying lengths will be the natural medium of poetic drama. Rhyme, unless it has a special purpose, should be sparingly used. In many modern verse plays it is a little too frequent. It tends to make verse 'poetry' independent of drama. Besides, rhyme makes the ear expectant, and there is a disappointment when it does not come. It also makes the audience verse-conscious, which may hamper the consciousness of drama. Finally, it breaks the flow of the natural speech-pattern. It causes the very jolt which Eliot wants poetic drama to avoid. It is not difficult to understand why Shakespeare avoided rhyme in his mature plays.

I have mentioned some devices which appear in modern poetic drama. But as the use of the chorus is very common, it is necessary to examine it in detail. In Greece the chorus was very closely related to a ritualistic performance which developed into tragedy. It was an expository device but it had various functions. The ritualistic association and the conditions of the Greek stage favoured the chorus which became a convention. But as the Greek dramatic art matured, the dramatists found that it was an impediment, and had to reduce its importance. English drama which is very different from Greek drama never accepted the chorus as a convention. The chorus, unless it is very carefully handled, holds up the onward momentum of drama and becomes fatal. Shakespeare aimed at the choral effect sparingly. Some good examples are found in *Richard III* and *Macbeth*. Synge knew how to produce the right choral effect even without using the chorus, as in *Riders to the Sea*:

[She pauses again with her hand stretched out towards the door. It opens softly and old women begin to come in, crossing themselves on the threshold and kneeling in front of the stage, with red petticoats on their heads...]

Cathleen : Is it Bartley it is ?

One of the Women : It is surely. God rest his soul.

[... Then men carry in the body of Bartley and they lay it on the table.]

Cathleen : What way was he drowned ?

One of the Women : The grey pony knocked him out into the sea, and he was washed out where there is a great surf on the white rocks.

[The women are keening softly and swaying themselves with a slow movement. Cathleen and Nora kneel at the other end of the table. The men kneel near the door.]

But the devices which appear in modern poetic drama are hardly dramatic. On the other hand such contrivances are attempts to produce remoteness to justify the appearance of poetry and verse. Art becomes showmanship. In *The Ascent of F 6* the play is hardly "the thing", and devices come to be more important than drama. One cannot see the wood for the trees. The failure to produce straightforward poetic drama is painfully obvious.

Elizabethan drama had its problems and shortcomings, and critics like Sidney and Jonson were very critical indeed, and yet Elizabethan drama, even if we exclude Shakespeare, is great enough. There is hope for poetic drama in our time, even if we do not think of Eliot and Fry. I shall choose some minor plays for discussion, for minor attempts are sometimes more significant than major achievements. *The Purification*, a one-act tragedy by Tennessee Williams, is a play of crime and trial, and its simple poetic interpretation of life reminds us of the tragedies of Lorca. There is fusion of poetry and drama in its manner of unfolding action and characters, and its verse is elastic enough to produce tension and relaxation. *Step-in-the-Hollow* by Donagh Macdonagh is good fun. It is not poetic drama ; it is versification of naturalist drama. It could be written in prose but much of its wit lies in making verse do the work of prose. Its verse, though not poetic, has an air of efficiency and has no difficulty in creating and controlling characters and situations and in making the play move on all the time. Eliot says : "It seems to me that if we are to have a poetic

drama, it is more likely to come from poets learning how to write plays than from skilful prose dramatists learning to write poetry".¹⁸ *The Purification* comes from a leading American prose dramatist. Eliot says : "A really dramatic verse can be employed... to say the most matter-of-fact things".¹⁹ The "most matter-fact" things have been said quite tellingly by the verse of *Step-in-the-Hollow*, an Irish play.

II

Murder in the Cathedral is the result of a long preparation. Before the great dramatic revival there was hardly any drama in the nineteenth century, and the craving for drama was partially satisfied not only in the poetic drama of the Victorians but also in their non-dramatic poetry. The dramatic quality is now quite strong in poetry, and the poetry of Eliot, like the poetry of Browning, shows this quality. There are three distinct elements : attention to dramatic structure (*The Waste Land*) ; dramatisation of consciousness (*Gerontion*) ; dramatic combination of character, situation and speech (*Portrait of a Lady*). Eliot's critical writings bear witness to his great interest in poetic drama. His introduction to *Savonarola*, a play written by his mother in rhymed couplets, shows his growing belief. The general feeling that prose drama was exhausted acted as an impetus, and the failure of several serious attempts by his contemporaries to revive poetic drama was a useful lesson. Then came *Sweeney Agonistes* as an experiment and feeler. *The Rock*, a pageant, and "Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry", an essay, seeking to recover the lost link between ritual and drama in the mass liturgy, are more significant because both show a distinct move towards religious

drama. Eliot's frequent references to *Everyman* in his critical writings prove that he carefully studied its allegory, dramatic pattern and verse. Then came *Murder in the Cathedral* followed by a lecture on religious drama, medieval and modern, which is a clear statement of what religious drama means to Eliot. The religious interest which is so strong in Eliot's non-dramatic poetry finds a dramatic expression in the play.

But *Murder in the Cathedral* is an exceptional play, and its success is negative. It has achieved success by avoiding the problems of modern poetic drama, not by solving them. Eliot himself admits that "the play was a dead end". It has a natural remoteness and a basis in a great Christian tradition, and as a religious play of a very special kind it will be always enjoyed on a special stage by a special audience. For the very same reasons it makes successful use of a special kind of poetry which, though not strictly dramatic, has a charm of its own. It is ritual-drama, and it is *participation* drama for it invites the audience to participate in an act of worship. Though its theme is remote, its appeal is immediate and quick. It gives a new meaning to drama and makes it a fresh experience. It has a great beauty of design, and the design is very unusual. It takes the chorus from Greek drama but does not follow the convention of divisions, and it rejects the unities of time and place. Then very boldly it passes from classical drama to medieval drama, and its relation to the medieval stage, choir and congregation is quite obvious. Its characters are more abstract than concrete but rather different from the characters of the Morality play. It is a subtle variation on the pattern of allegory, symmetry and balance of the Morality. It rejects blank verse as a regular medium and uses the verse of *Everyman*,

prose and rhyme, alliteration and the rhythm of hymns and chants. Its language has a deliberate design of imagery and a calculated neutrality because, as Eliot himself explains, it is "committed neither to the present nor to the past". But all this was of very great use "only in one play and of no use for any other". *Murder in the Cathedral* is a dangerous model, and any imitation of it is likely to end in disaster.

St. Joan is not religious drama ; its stress is on the role of Joan in medieval history, and the tragic pattern of pity and irony in the epilogue is meant to be a lesson to the twentieth century. The human tragedy of Joan is an integral part of the dramatic substance. *Murder in the Cathedral* is very different from *St. Joan*. Eliot writes : "I did not want to write a chronicle of twelfth-century politics, nor did I want to tamper unscrupulously with the meagre records...I wanted to concentrate on death and martyrdom". This theme of martyrdom, in terms of dramatic action, is : "A man comes home fore-seeing that he will be killed, and he is killed."²⁰ There is no emphasis on history or on the human tragedy of Becket ; the play dramatises the experience of martyrdom.

"Yeats complains that 'nowhere has the author explained how Becket and the King differ in aim.' This is, according to Raymond Williams, "confusing history with a situation that defines an experience" for "the death serves as an expression of the permanent experience of martyrdom."²¹ It is true that there is enough history in the speeches of the chorus, priests, tempters, knights and Becket himself. But it is equally true that the conflict which has given rise to the drama of martyrdom has not been dramatically motivated because the difference between the aims of Becket and those of Henry has

not been made clear. This certainly weakens the work as drama. Henry is the real antagonist, though he does not appear in the play ; the knights are only agents. Yeats goes to a level deeper than Becket's *deeds* that roused the wrath of Henry ; he wants a dramatic explanation of the difference between their *aims* which is the deeper cause of the conflict.

Though *Murder in the Cathedral* is a religious play, it is not possible to eliminate altogether certain considerations of history. Was the Becket of history a martyr in the sense in which Eliot has made his Becket a martyr ? Did Becket really foresee his death ? Did he come back only to seek martyrdom or was there some other purpose ? Such questions will be asked, and there is not enough material in the play to answer such questions. But these problems do not seriously affect the design of the play which is sufficiently clear. A more serious defect is a certain lack of clarity in the presentation of Becket—not because, as Yeats complains, the difference between the aims has not been made clear.

The inner drama of *Murder in the Cathedral* lies in the character of Becket and its development towards martyrdom. Becket returns to England to seek martyrdom, though a little inconsistently he says :

Never again, you must make no doubt,
Shall the sea run between the shepherd and
his fold.

But he is a proud man. The idea of pride may have come from the Morality ; it may have been suggested also by *St. Joan*^{**} in which it appears more than once, and which Eliot studied carefully,

as he himself admits. Becket's purification comes in the temptation episode, and the sermon states what Becket has achieved—knowledge of true martyrdom, which is possible only when the purification is complete. But the post-purification speeches and conduct of Becket are not sufficiently distinguished to show that a great change has actually taken place. In fact, there is discrepancy between what Becket says in the last passage of the temptation episode and the sermon and what he does and says later. Even loss of "will in the will of God" is not sufficiently borne out by his subsequent speeches and deeds. When the knights threaten Becket and leave the stage, he says :

Death will come only when I am worthy,
And if I am worthy, there is no danger.
I have therefore only to make perfect my will.

This means that he has a will of his own and that it has not been perfected. The following passages and the situation in which they appear cause further confusion :

But if you kill me, I shall rise from my tomb
To submit my cause before God's throne.
And I would no longer be denied ; all things
Proceed to a joyful consummation.

You, Reginald, three times traitor you :
Traitor to me as my temporal vassal,
Traitor to me as your spiritual lord,
Traitor to God in desecrating His Church.

If it is contended that the purification continued even after the temptation episode and the sermon and was completed just before death, Becket's

"No I" and 'Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain" (in the temptation episode) and his declaration that "in a short time you may have yet another martyr" (in the sermon) lose much of their significance.

Let us not think of the Becket of history. But the question is: did Eliot's Becket conquer his pride? "Humility", says Eliot in his Shakespeare Association Lecture, "is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve." In the same lecture he says that Shakespeare borrowed from Seneca, for the benefit of some of his tragic heroes, an attitude of "self-dramatization", which is "the refuge for the individual in an indifferent and hostile world". Did Becket conquer "the human will to see things as they are not", "this individualism, this vice of Pride"? In the sermon and subsequent speeches Becket betrays an ego, a refined ego, a kind of self-consciousness which is not very different from that of Othello or Hamlet in their last speeches, and which is, on the spiritual plane, a more subtle foe (to borrow the phrase of Donne) than the fourth tempter:

I have spoken to you to-day, dear children of God, of the martyrs of the past, asking you to remember, especially our martyr of Canterbury, the blessed Archbishop Elphege ... and because, dear children, I do not think I shall ever preach to you again; and because it is possible that in a short time you may have yet another martyr, and that one perhaps not the last. I would have you keep in your hearts these words that I say, and think of them at another time.

Is it very different from Othello's "Soft you; a

word or two before you go"? Is the gesture very different from Hamlet's farewell to life?

In the introduction to the Oxford Book of Modern Verse Yeats wrote: "Passive suffering is not a theme of poetry." And yet Eliot has nearly always sought poetry in passivity, in visions of decay and desolation, and it is this poetry which appears in *Murder in the Cathedral*, and both Becket and the women are passive sufferers under "the design of God". The excessive stress on fatalism and passivity has taken away much of drama from the play and much of the joy of martyrdom. The joy of a martyr is neither the zeal of a fanatic nor the extinction of all interests. It lies in calm and willing submission to the will of God.

In commenting on the key passage in which activity and passivity are identified Mathiessen writes: "The firmness of its doctrine reveals how far Eliot has advanced in his possession of Dante's conception of grace."¹⁸ He also quotes a passage from Jonathan Edwards, which is, however, slightly different from what Eliot says. The idea is very common in Indian philosophy—the Upanishads and the Gita—and it is likely that Eliot has been influenced also by the Indian doctrine. In fact, he made use of some Upanishadic doctrines in *The Waste Land* (1922). The passage is closely related to the conception of martyrdom which appears in the sermon. Becket says:

For my lord I am now ready to die,
That his Church may have peace and liberty.

After his death the third priest declares that "the Church is stronger for this action." But neither the conception of martyrdom nor what Becket or the priest says makes it dramatically clear how Becket's

death or martyrdom will bring peace and liberty and strength to the Church. The concluding part of the play is thus somewhat weakened.

Becket is the only dramatic character in the play. The women constitute the formal chorus but others are also more or less choral figures. The priests are the voices of the Church, while the tempters are the voices of Becket—voices from within. The knights are the voices of the kind and are reduced to views, especially in their prose speeches. There is little characterisation in *Murder in the Cathedral* which is an exceptional play. The groups are, however, carefully chosen. The women are the people; the priests are the Church; feudalism appears in the knights; the tempters are the inner enemies rising from the self and showing the stages of Becket's development towards martyrdom. But Becket stands alone, and his loneliness is the loneliness of a saint and martyr, which Shaw has so dramatically brought out in *St. Joan*.²⁴ He is very different from these groups and rises superior to each of them. The conflict between the State and the Church leads to his death, and as he dies, the knights retire after acknowledging that he "was, after all, a great man", and the stamp of his personality is left on the third priest. *Murder in the Cathedral* is a one-man play, but within the framework of retorical drama it shows the marks of a true tragedy.

Like the early Attic tragedy *Murder in the Cathedral* is a chorric play; it depends very largely on the chorus. The formal chorus of Canterbury women is not divided in the Greek manner. But this is not the only difference. The play has more than one chorus. The priests and the tempters have chorric functions, and sometimes they are openly choral. The four tempters form a chorus when they say: "Man's life is a cheat and disappointment".

The three priests form a chorus when they say : "O Thomas, my lord, do not fight the intractable tide." Then the women, the priests and the tempters speak alternately : "Is it the owl that calls... and feel the cold in his groin". Even the knights form themselves into a chorus more than once :

You are his servant, his tool and his jack,
You wore his favours on your back...
Creeping out of the London dirt,
Grawling up like a louse on your shirt...

Where is Becket, the traitor to the King ?
Where is Becket, the meddling priest ?
Come down Daniel to the lions' den,
Come down Daniel for the mark of the beast.

That the characters are meant to be choric is clear because Eliot makes hardly any attempt to differentiate them as characters or individuals. There is only differentiation of moods, views and functions.

Eliots' non-dramatic poetry, as in *Portrait of a Lady*, *Gerontion* and *A Song for Simeon*, is largely passive ; it is the poetry of waiting and watching, despair and suffering, a vision of decay and disintegration. This poetry re-appears in the chorus. It is not perhaps very wrong to think that the choice of the poor and helpless women as the chorus has been influenced by the demands of this kind of poetry. One feels sometimes that the chorus is used in certain situations mainly to provide for such poetry. The emotional and intellectual range of the chorus is naturally limited but as an expository device the chorus supplied quite adequately the political and social context with a stress on the suffering of the people. It also shows the hold that Becket had on his people, thus giving an important emotional quality to the play. A large part of its contribution lies in the creation of an atmosphere of

premonition and fear, sorrow and suffering, foreboding and resignation. The women only wait and watch and feel with Becket that the doom comes nearer. Then there is the sense of horror followed by the sense of defilement and of the need for purification. The Te Deum chorus transcends horror and sorrow, and with the confirmation of faith comes the "Peace which passeth understanding". The play begins and ends with the chorus.

There is an excessive emphasis on the passivity and distress of the chorus, and there is hardly any relaxation. Again, as long as the chorus is kept on the planes of emotions and sensations, its tone is convincing but there is a change in the Dies Irae chorus which rises to an intellectual level :

And behind the face of Death the Judgement
And behind the Judgement the void, more
 horrid than active shapes of hell ;
Eftiness, absence, separation from God...
Where the soul is no longer deceived, for
 there are no objects, no tones. ...

It is great poetry but its assignment to the "foolish" and "hysterical" women of Canterbury may be questioned. The choral passage following the departure of the knights who depart only to "come with swords" is one of the weakest parts of the play. That the "senses are quickened" by a feeling of premonition is a fact. That the senses are stronger in animals and birds than in men is a fact. It is easy to understand that animal forces are active in the drama of martyrdom and that the sense of horror and aversion is quite natural. It is also a fact that Eliot planned his chorus to be a group of "excited and sometimes hysterical women." In fact, they are the only women in the play, and this is dramatically important for more than one reason.

But nothing can defend the deliberate (so deliberate as to be mechanical) and inordinate emphasis on the senses, on the images of animals, birds and other creatures—there are at least sixteen references—and on the images of nausea and disgust—there are at least seven references—which produce no legitimate poetic or dramatic effect. Such images do appear in the non-dramatic poetry of Eliot, but in a more restrained manner and within reasonable limits, as in *Gerontion and Whispers of Immortality*. The “loon” may be excused; its appearance at the moment may be justified. But there is no convincing reason why the poor women of Canterbury should be made to be interested in a “jerboa” which is a desert rodent. It is true that Canterbury is situated near the sea, and this probably accounts for the use of some of the sea images in the play, but to make the women lie on the floor of the sea to experience the “ingurgitation of the sponge” is hardly fair.

The chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral* has great lyrical beauty, and the music of its poetry is reinforced by choir songs. Raymond Williams thinks that the chorus is also “a link between ritual and believers.” He says: “Chorus is choir, the articulate voice of the body of worshippers.” But this is true only of the Te Deum chorus. Eliot writes: “The use of the chorus strengthened the power and concealed the defects of my theatrical technique.”²⁶ The chorus is certainly the strength of *Murder in the Cathedral*. But the chorus is also its weakness. It appears before or after a dramatic situation, serving very often as a lyrical link between episodes, and as it is not integrated into the play, the choral passages are easily detachable. But a more serious defect is the undue length of some of the choruses which painfully halt the movement of drama. As the knights leave the stage to “come with swords”,

there is a great dramatic moment, a moment taut with suspense, excitement and expectancy. Just then comes the long choral passage on the quickening of the senses. Equally detrimental to the dramatic movement is the length of the passage on defilement and purification at the moment of Becket's death. The stage direction itself sounds rather absurd : "While the Knights kill him we hear the chorus." When we examine the blanks in dramatic movement or action caused by the chorus we find its weakness. Had the chorus been allowed to take part in action it could have been much more effective.

Eliot's writings show his great interest in the form of drama. In his radio talk he said : "...we have to make use of suggestions from remote drama, too remote for there to be any danger of imitation, such as *Everyman*, and the late medieval morality and mystery plays, and the great Greek dramatists."¹⁷ In the structure of his play Eliot makes use of suggestions from these sources. *Murder in the Cathedral* does not observe the Greek unities of time and place. But its chorus is largely Greek. The play has a certain quality of tenseness which results from the Greek method of concentrating on the last phase in the career of the hero. But this concentration also appears in *Everyman*. Martin Browne rightly observes : "Everyman has the further advantage that its action is concentrated : instead of trying to trace the fortune of mankind through a whole lifetime, it begins at the point where man is confronted with Death, and this gives to the whole play an urgency lacking from some of the other Moralities."¹⁸ In *Agamemnon* the theme of the return of a doomed leader of men shows a dramatic fusion of tragic pity and tragic irony. Eliot's play has a similar theme on the religious plane, and though there is little scope for the use of irony in religious drama, the tragic significance is quite clear. The stress on

premonition is a common feature of Greek tragedies but it has been exaggerated in Eliot's play. Fatalism which is quite strong in some Greek plays appears without any conflict in *Murder in the Cathedral* and has been made a part of the general pattern of religious experience. It is necessary for us to note these points which are closely related to the form of the play.

The Morality play follows the medieval literary tradition of allegory. It is, as Browne explains, "an allegory, in which figures representing Virtues and Vices, forces of good, and evil, contend for man's soul. Dramatically, this type of play has severe limitations, for no character can behave unexpectedly."²⁰ In the temptation episode Eliot follows the broad structure of the Morality but he differs in the details. He does not use the traditional figures and he does not give his figures any names ; he calls them Tempters. He makes no use of the traditional pattern of conflict between the forces of good and evil. The conflict is different. It is between Becket and his pride (which is also a craving for power and glory) to show the development of his career towards martyrdom. The temptation episode stresses the importance of self-knowledge which enables Becket to grasp the true conception and significance of martyrdom "the design of God" and the less of "will in the will of God." The next stage is martyrdom. The temptation episode is the dramatisation of the experience of self knowledge, while the knights come to dramatise martyrdom itself. Eliot's treatment is more psychological than that in the Morality because the force of evil has been made an intimate part of the career and character of Becket. This treatment also reveals the earlier stages of his life which have not been dramatised in the play. The temptations not only explain the different stages of Becket's life but also go deeper and deeper

into his character till the subtle vice of doing "the right deed for the wrong reason" is fully exposed. The first three temptations are material—Pleasure, Power (Chancellorship) and Power (Alliance with the barons). The fourth temptation is spiritual ; it is a shrewd form of pride and power closely related to a craving for the "perpetual glory" of martyrdom. Mathiessen calls it a temptation to the proud mind to become so confident in its wisdom that it seeks—and takes for granted—a martyr's crown as its reward. But it is not wisdom. It is once again power, the proud and therefore sinful consciousness of holding spiritual power :

No ! Shall I, who keep the keys
Of heaven and hell...
Descend to desire a punier power ?

The fourth tempter flings back at Becket not only his first speech in the play ("They know and to not know...for ever still.") but also the line : "You hold the keys of heaven and hell." Then he tempts Becket :

Power to bind and loose...
You hold the skein : wind, Thomas, wind
The thread of eternal life and death.
You hold this power, hold it.

Then come two great passages drawing out the secret thoughts of Becket—"You have also thought ..." and "Yes, Thomas, yes..." The fourth temptation is a cruel assault, and Becket stands stunned by the sudden revelation :

I have thought of these things.

Then in despair he questions :

But what is there to do ? What is left
to be done ?
Is there no enduring crown to be won ?

But even as he reels, he rallies, and then comes the "No!"—the "Everlasting No" (to borrow the phrase of Carlyle), and the temptation episode becomes a dramatic ritual of purification.

But the temptations offer certain difficulties which arise from a certain lack of clarity in the conception and presentation of the tempters. The Morality presents the forces of good and evil, though subjective, as objective and concrete figures on the stage. But in *Murder in the Cathedral* the tempters are not strictly traditional figures. Producers will have their own plans of presentation. But there is nothing in the text to make the position clear. Are the tempters wholly subjective ? Are they equally subjective ? Does the manner of presentation cross the strict border-line between the subjective and the objective ? The first tempter :

Here I have come, forgetting all acrimony...
Your Lordship won't forget that evening
on the river
When the king, and you and I were all
friends together ?

The second tempter :

We met at Clarendon, at Northampton,
And last at Montmirail, in Maine.

The third tempter :

I am a rough straightforward Englishman.

It is possible to interpret these passages on the

subjective plane but they have a certain objective emphasis which may cause some confusion. If the tempters are wholly subjective, only abstractions, their combination with the objective figures of the chorus and priests in the passage, "Is it the owl ... groin" is hardly convincing. There cannot be, however, any question about the subjectivity of the fourth tempter.

Eliot says: "A man comes home foreseeing that he will be killed, and he is killed". Becket says: "All things prepare the event, watch". Evidently, then, Becket came because he sought martyrdom, and he was prepared. To go back to a life of pleasure, to resume the role of the Chancellor, to arrange a coalition with the barons—such thoughts were not in his mind. He had in his mind only a craving for the glory and power of a martyr. Why, then, do the first three tempters appear and why did Becket expect them? There can be no question about the unexpected fourth visitor whose appearance is a dramatic necessity. If it is said that the first three tempters appear because there was in Becket's mind a faint consciousness of the possibility of the recurrence of the first three temptations, it is difficult to explain the great stress which has been laid on this part of the episode. Again, it cannot be said that the first three tempters come to present a picture of the earlier stages of Becket's life, because this is done in the speeches of the messenger, the priests and Becket himself.

The larger part of the temptation episode is a blank for the chorus and the priests, which is a problem to the producer and the actors. The chorus and the priests remain in the background and have nothing to do. As each tempter finishes his business, he joins the group of silent figures, swelling the number. Keeping a large number of characters

detached for a long time from what happens on the stage is certainly very awkward. In fact, there are only two active figures at a time—Becket and a tempter. When Becket delivers his last speech, which is fairly long, there are thirteen inactive figures (if the chorus is composed of six women) on the stage. Such blanks are very frequent in *Murder in the Cathedral* and expose the weakness of Eliot's theatrical technique. Then there are the long group-speeches that halt the dramatic movement. The following lines in the group-speech of the four tempters come unexpectedly and we are too light for a serious situation :

The Catherine wheel, the pantomime cat,
The prizes given at the children's party,
The prize awarded for the English Eassy ...

The sullen humour of the second priest who scolds the chorus just before the arrival of Becket is much better :

You go on croaking like frogs in the treetops :
But frogs at last can be cooked and eaten.

The sermon as an interlude has not received the critical attention which it deserves. It is very natural and dramatic, and it is historical. Its emotional value is great, and it is a legitimate dramatic preparation for the episode of murder and martyrdom. Taken as an address to the chorus, it justifies the presence of the women on the stage. Taken as an address to the audience, it establishes an intimate link between the stage and the audience—a link which has a thrill of its own—and like the Te Deum chorus it intensifies the religious atmosphere of the stage and auditorium and strengthens *Murder in the Cathedral* as participation-drama.

The sermon is an integral part of the play

because it explains the significance of the theme of martyrdom. It explains "the deep meaning and mystery of our masses of Christmas day". It explains the Christian idea of peace which is "not peace as the world goes"—a message which the Christian world certainly needed in 1935. The sermon also points out that it is not an accident "that the day of the first martyr follows immediately the day of the Birth of Christ". Here is a preparation for what Becket says in his first speech after the second entrance of the knights :

His blood given to buy my life,
My blood given to pay for His death.

The sermon shows clearly that *Murder in the Cathedral* is ritualistic drama. The relation between the sermon and the temptation episode is very clear. The conception of martyrdom is a purged version of Becket's earlier notion. It stresses the idea that martyrdom is the result of the "design of God" and loss of "well in the will of God". The fourth tempter says :

Seek the way of martyrdom, make
yourself the lowest
On earth, to be high in heaven

The sermon repeats the idea in almost the same language : "... so in Heaven the Saints are most high, having made themselves most low." The only difference is that now there is no pride, no power, no will.

It is very easy to interpret Becket's martyrdom as "senseless self-slaughter." In fact, this view appears more than once. The tempters declare in a choric passage :

This man is obstinate, blind, intent
On self-destruction.

The fourth knight's verdict is : "Suicide while of unsound mind," It is therefore probable that Eliot means the last part of the sermon to be a re-statement in clear prose of what Becket says in his last speech in the temptation episode. Though an address to the public, the sermon is to Becket himself a soliloquy by which he assures himself that he is delivered and that never again will he make a mistake because he has learnt how to do the right deed for the *right* reason.

The sermon is a relaxation without a jolt. Its prose has the dignity of restraint and a beauty born of simplicity. It has a great emotional appeal which a good actor will easily convey by suitable pauses and by changing the pitch of his voice and giving it a slight tremor at the right moments. Eliot remarks : "A sermon cast in verse is too unusual an experience for even the most regular church-goer."⁵⁰ A sermon in poetic drama is an exceptional case, and *Murder in the Cathedral* is an exceptional play.

In a prefactory note Eliot writes : "In the second edition a chorus was substituted for the introits which, in the first edition, constituted the opening of Part II. To this third edition the introits have been added as an appendix, and may be used instead of that chorus in productions of this play." Part II in the third edition opens with a choric passage which is an echo of a part of the sermon :

Is there not peace upon earth, good will
among men ?

Again, the priests become choric before the entrance of the knights, which means that the choral element becomes excessive. The lines assigned to the priests are appropriate, and the introits are effective variations. But if we drop the opening chorus and retain

the introits the opening of Part II becomes too long. The opening of Part II is a problem.

The knights constitute the last force of opposition as a prelude to martyrdom. The other forces of opposition are the chorus, the priests and the tempters. Each group offers obstruction in its own way and produces a sense of conflict. But Becket rises superior to each group and moves towards martyrdom which is "the design of God". There is an interesting link between the tempters and the knights. The temptations re-appear as charges and threats ; the substance remains unchanged. The causal relation is quite clear. It is because Becket has conquered the temptations that he is able to defy the knights. His victory on the internal plane is the cause of his victory on the external plane. The tempters by trying to persuade him give him his self-knowledge, and the knights by murdering him make him a martyr. The episode of martyrdom is the fulfilment of the temptation episode.

The two groups are, in a way, largely identical. The first knight says : "I am not myself qualified to put our case to you. I am a man of action, and not of words." The first knight is blunt ; he is incapable of thinking ; he lives on the level of the senses ; his action is only a series of deeds without thoughts. The first tempter appears on the plane of the senses and tries to lure Becket to a life of pleasure : "Fluting in the meadows, viols in the hell." The second knight says : "Our King...intended that Becket...should unite the offices of Chancellor and Archbishop...he resigned the office of Chancellor." The second tempter says : "The Chancellorship that you resigned...still may be regained." The third tempter wants Becket to hold power through an alliance with the barons. The third knight is Baron William de Traci. The fourth tempter's advice is :

"Seek the way of martyrdom". The fourth knight's inference is that "he had determined upon a death by martyrdom." If the actors who appear as the tempters only change their dresses and re-appear as the knights, the significance of the link may be easily communicated. The link between the two episodes is an excellent dramatic device and gives a peculiar unity to the play. But is the link only an after-thought? It does not appear in the verse passages; it is made clear, after the death of Becket, in the prose-speeches of the knights. Eliot has spoiled his device by not using it at an earlier stage.

The knights' addresses are a serious blemish. Referring to the use of platform prose Eliot writes: "I may, for aught I know, have been slightly under the influence of *St. Joan*." But *St. Joan* is very different; it is not religious drama like *Murder in the Cathedral*. There is little doubt that Eliot thought not only of the prose of Shaw but also of his epilogue. But the epilogue, which skilfully uses the medieval dream-tradition—and therefore it stands detached from the body of naturalist play—to present a picture of the posthumous career of Joan within a tragic pattern of pity and irony, is a dramatic necessity. The addresses add nothing essential and do not grow dramatically out of the situation. Eliot's defence that the use of platform prose is a "trick" meant "to shock the audience out of their complacency" is hardly convincing because a shock of this kind is an injury to religious drama. Again, the addresses halt the natural movement of the play towards the end. That movement after a very long break caused by the clean-and-wash chorus and the knights' speeches, is taken up by the first priest. But the damage is done. There is little or no drama left after the death of Becket, and the Te Deum chorus is too long.

For a religious play *Murder in the Cathedral* is a

very unusual title. It reminds one too readily of crime fiction, an Agatha Christie novel. Some of the lines in the knights' addresses seem to be significant. The first knight refers to the principle of "Trial by Jury." The fourth knight asks in the manner of a crime novelist: "Who killed the Archbishop?" He believes that the death of Becket is a case of "Suicide while of Unsound Mind". This is cheap wit. Equally cheap is the sudden and unexpected gibe, "though sightseers come with guide-books looking over it" in the Te Deum chorus.

Let us now examine some features of Eliot's language and verse, most of which appear in his non-dramatic poetry but show a tendency towards mannerisms in *Murder in the Cathedral*. Repetition is very regular, so regular as to be almost mechanical. The recurrence of certain words and images seeks to emphasise a mood or the significance of a character or situation. Words like *clean*, *death*, *destiny*, *doom*, *fear*, *pride void*, *wait*, *wash*, *watch*, *wheel* and *will* appear again and again; in the first chorus alone *wait* appears 14 times. Images of animals and birds and other creatures are very frequent—*ape*, *bear*, *beetle*, *boar*, *crow*, *hyaena*, *jackal*, *jackass*, *jackdaw*, *jerboa*, *kite*, *leopard*, *lobster*, *loon*, *mouse*, *owl*, *oyster*, *rat*, *viper*, *whelk* and *wolf*. While alliteration frequently sets a pattern of sounds, repetition of words often serves as a substitute for alliteration and gives a certain rhythm to some passages like "Ill the wind, ill the time. . and grey the sky, grey grey grey". Lines like "Living and partly living" are repeated to produce various effects. Refrains appear sometimes with great effect, as in the tipsy verse of the knights or in the introit sections of Part II. Occasionally a chiastic change in the order of words appears: "... the air is heavy and thick. Thinck and heavy

the sky". "As oak and stone; stone and oak decay."

Second Priest : Your Lordship will find
your rooms in order as you left them.

Thomas: And will try to leave them in order as I find them.

Eliot says : "The rhythm of regular blank verse had become too remote from the movement of modern speech. Therefore what I kept in mind was the versification of *Everyman*."⁸¹ But blank verse is not altogether avoided. Eliot found "some use of alliteration, and occasional unexpected rhyme" very helpful. But these are not the only devices. His lines are of greatly varying lengths, the variations being prompted by the internal necessity of moods and feelings and the external necessity of acting and adjustment to natural breath lengths. Unrhymed verse is more frequent than rhymed verse but his unrhymed verse is sometimes so dexterously prepared that one does not feel the absence of rhyme. There are various kinds of rhyme, including internal rhymes and assonance-rhymes of vowels or consonants. Sprung rhythm, rhythmic prose and cadences and echoes of hymns and anthems are also used. The following passages, in addition to those already quoted, will serve as examples of Eliot's verse :

If you ask my opinion, I think that this peace
Is nothing like an end or like a beginning...
My Lord, he said, I leave you as a man
Whom in this life I shall not see again.

Will only soar and hover, circling lower...
 End will be simple, sudden, God-given.
 Spring has come in winter. Snow in the branches
 Shall float as sweet as blossom. Ice along the
 ditches
 Mirror the sunlight.

To be master of servant within an hour,
 This is the course of temporal power.
 The Old Kind shall know it, when at last breath,
 No sons, no empire, he bites broken teeth.

All my life they have been coming, these feet.
 All my life
 I have waited.

In the small circle of pain within the skull
 You still shall tramp and tread on endless
 round....

Pacing for ever in the hell of make-believe
 Which never is belief : this is your fate on earth
 And we must think no further of you.

There is no rest in the house. There is no rest
 in the street.
 I hear restless movement of feet. And the air
 is heavy and thick.

The horror of the effortless journey, to the
 empty land...
 Where those who were men can no longer
 turn their mind....

Where the soul is no longer deceived, for there
 are no objects, no tones,
 No colours, no forms to distract, to divert
 the soul

From seeing itself, foully united for ever,
nothing with nothing...

[This idea re-appears in "Hell is oneself" in *The Cocktail Party* and is far more terrifying than Sartre's "Hell is other people" in his Existentialist one-acter *Hui-Clos*]

Since golden October declined into sombre
November

And the apples were gathered and stored, and
the land

became brown sharp points of death....
Unbar the doors ! throw open the doors !
I will not have the house of prayer,
the church of Christ,
The sanctuary, turned into a fortress....
The church shall be open, even to our
enemies. Open the door !

[It is useful to compare this passage with a similar passage in Tennyson's Becket to note the difference :

Why, these are our own monks who follow'd us !
And will you bolt them out, and have them
slain ?
Undo the doors, the church is not a castle.
Knock, and it shall be open'd.
Are you deaf ?]

Eliot's devices are certainly interesting. But by assembling so many experiments in a short play he makes us a little too verse-conscious, just as the deliberateness of the dramatic design makes us a little too conscious of the form of the play.

Murder in the Cathedral is a landmark in modern drama. The impact of its revivalism has been strongly felt, and though it is an exceptional play, it has proved two things of great importance to the future of poetic drama : that great drama is born only on the plane of poetry, and that verse can give to drama a meaning and feeling which prose can never give.

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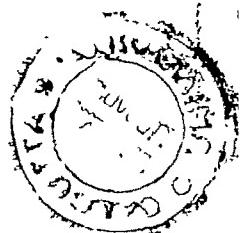
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